

International Centre
on Conflict and Negotiation

Research Paper
“Russia-Georgia:
reciprocal
perception”

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INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Back in 2008 when the conflict between Russia and Georgia broke out, International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation initiated the most long-standing of dialogue efforts between Russian and Georgian high-profile political experts, named later, as per the site of the meetings, the Istanbul Process. GPPAC, as a global network of civil society organisations, working across conflicts on an international level, and perceived as being able to play an impartial role in facilitating the dialogue processes, supported and partnered this important initiative, offering a framework that provided the needed, politically neutral, environment for the Russian and Georgian sides to engage with each other.

The first meeting was organised in Istanbul in November 2008 with Georgian and Russian participants selected among respected civil society leaders, recognised academics, as well as former government and diplomatic officials – all prominent political experts and opinion leaders in their societies. The meeting constituted the first direct cross-border exchange of positions and opinions between the Georgian and Russian sides since the August 2008 war and marked the beginning of what then shaped into a long term process of exchange concerning the fundamental causes of the conflict and analysis of ongoing political developments.

Substantial change of political environment related to Russia-Georgia relationships since the October 2012 Parliamentary elections in Georgia, allowed for the first time that the dialogue has a change of raising from track-two (strictly non-governmental) to track one-and a-half (including informal participation of governmental and political figures). The prospect of political negotiations on broad spectrum of issues, not yet crossing the ‘red lines’ in bilateral relations is gradually shaping. Being longest-living among all the efforts so far done to develop a dialogue between Russian and Georgian high profile experts, the Istanbul Process contains serious potential for its development. The immediate plans include, apart from the international meetings and discussions, further joint sociological surveys and studies.

Professor George Khutsishvili

Director, International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation

Empirical Study **“Perception of Georgia and Georgians in the Russian Society”** was conducted within the frames of the program funded by the *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts*. The survey was carried out by the Carnegie Moscow Center in 2012.

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PERCEPTION OF GEORGIA AND GEORGIANS IN THE RUSSIAN SOCIETY

I. THE PROGRAM OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

The current relations between countries of the former Soviet Union are undergoing a significant change. Studying both the dynamics and the statics of this process is a farsighted and strategically important endeavor. **The aim** of the present study is to investigate the perceptions of Georgia by different layers of the Russian society. The paper will address the following **research questions**:

- Is Georgia's image consistent across different layers of the Russian society?
- How Georgia is perceived by the Russian public in comparison to other CIS countries?
- What stages of development of the relations between Russia and Georgia have been stored in the historical memory of the Russians? How are these stages perceived?
- How do the Russians assess the present and the future of Russian-Georgian relations? Where do they see opportunities for cooperation? What do they recognize as major threats coming from Georgia?

To achieve the aforementioned goal the following **research objectives** have been set:

1. Study of secondary sociological data that demonstrate the attitude of Russians to Georgia (its year-to-year dynamics).
2. Collection of primary data from the most relevant groups of Russia's population.
3. Drafting a research report, showing how the Russians currently perceive Georgia.

The object of the study is represented by Georgia as a country - a single geographic, political, and economic entity within its set state borders. **The subject** of the study is represented by the totality of views and perceptions of Georgia as a country by the Russian citizens.

The selection of participants of the study. Two groups of respondents appear to be the most relevant for the present study:

- *Experts* in the field of international relations, having strong credentials in the academic field and also representing the opinion of the older generation with relevant experience of living in the USSR.
- *Russian youth*, representing the current trends and being the most mobile part of the population. Two focus groups were conducted with students.

The type of research study: qualitative sociological study. This type of methodology is used to study the image and identify the qualitative properties

of the investigated object – causes, characteristics, perceived threats, opportunities, and others.

Geography: Moscow as the biggest urban center that reflects, and sometimes anticipates the overall moods and trends across the Russian society.

Data collection methodology. Secondary data is represented by open-source materials, which allow to define common characteristics in perceptions of Georgia. Focus group method is considered to be the most appropriate one to collect primary data as it allows to get the best image characteristics of the object. In the framework of focus groups projective techniques will be used, which, with certain incentives can help retrieve more detailed information about the investigated phenomenon.

Tools. Two semi-formalized focus group guidebooks represent the tools of the project.

II. RESULTS.

1. Attitude toward Georgia in the context of the CIS countries.

The Russians perceive the CIS countries as a rather formal and currently irrelevant project of the past. Against the background of global consolidation of Europe and the U.S., the CIS, which has not been able to repeat the USSR's success, is perceived quite poorly:

The CIS is associated with poverty and dullness [focus group 1]

...There is a feeling that the CIS is characterized by a certain incapability, formality, and backwardness [focus group 2]

Being aimed at pooling the resources and countering Europe and the U.S., the CIS appeared to be inefficient:

The CIS is one of those unions that exist only because nobody wants to abolish it [focus group with experts]

According to the participants, the CIS is heterogeneous. For instance, the state of the economic conditions, cultural traditions, history, and political trends unite Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Russia is close to Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan [focus group 1]

Russia's affinity with these CIS countries is confirmed by the results of a national survey in Russia, presented below.

	May 05	May 06	Aug 07	Mar 09	May 10	May 11	May 12
Belarus	46	47	38	50	49	35	34
Kazakhstan	20	33	39	38	32	33	28
Germany	23	22	24	17	24	20	17
China	12	24	19	18	16	18	16
Ukraine	17	10	11	3	20	21	13

Table 1. Could you name five countries that you consider Russia's closest allies and friends? ¹ (the answers are ranked accordingly to the last measurement).²

In turn, the Caucasus culture, a “belligerent” mentality and certain instability unites such countries as Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the perceptions of Russians.

Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, they are very close to each other as there are recurrent conflicts happening there [focus group 1]

In the context of the CIS countries, Georgia is perceived as the most detached, western-oriented state. Focus groups' participants remember well how the country changed its posture many times: it was the last to join the CIS and relatively recently seceded from it.

In the course of several years Georgia has pursued a separate policy; it was never very close to Russia, especially after the events of 2008 . Moreover, it has never sought cooperation with the CIS countries. All Georgia's activities are aimed not toward its geographical neighbors, but more in the direction of Brussels or Washington [focus group with experts]

Despite Georgia's perceived detachment and separation from its geographical neighbors, experts acknowledge its significant impact on the countries in the region:

¹ Source: Official website of the Levada Center <http://www.levada.ru/14-06-2012/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-drugim-stranam> The survey was conducted on 25-29 May 2012 among a representative national sample of urban and rural population consisting of 1,604 respondents aged 18 years or above across 130 settlements in 45 regions of the country. The distribution of answers is given as a percentage of all respondents together with data from the previous surveys. The margin of error of these surveys does not exceed 3.4 %.

² Five countries are listed in the descending order.

Despite the fact that Georgia left the CIS, it still has a certain influence on this region. [focus group with experts].

Overall, Georgia is perceived as a country with a general orientation toward the West, significant political and economic activity, but it also has the image of a belligerent state, prone to conflicts (along with Armenia and Azerbaijan “...just as the Caucasus in general”).

2. The image of Georgia in the contemporary Russian media

The participants of the study, representing a well-educated part of the Russian society, are quite critical to the information they get from the media, especially from the TV. They believe that most TV channels show what the public “should know” rather than “what happens in reality”.

It is possible that our perceptions do not correspond to reality... My mother was with a delegation in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Bus stops there are furnished with sofas, TVs, carpets. They live in luxury there – they found oil and now do not let anybody in [focus group 1]

Participants of the study have repeatedly pointed to the differences in presenting information about Georgia. Two main discrepancies can be defined:

First, the discrepancy between the real state of affairs in the country and the way it is presented in the Russian media and on the TV.

I have a feeling that the media is trying to prejudice us against Georgia. I have not seen a more anti-Georgian film than the one about butterflies, the “Olympius Inferno”...³ If you do not know anything about Georgia and then watch this film, you will have an impression that Georgia resembles Nazi Germany [focus group with experts].

Secondly, there is a discrepancy between the way Russian and Western media portray Georgia.

I was abroad during the summer 2008 and was watching TV... Western channels were saying that Russia broke in, while the Russian ones said that we were helping Ossetia. The truth is probably somewhere in-between. [focus group 1].

³ A Russian film, made in 2009, portraying events in the context of the 2008 conflict in Ossetia.

On the positive side, participants of the study noted the appearance of articles about Georgia as a tourist destination:

If you take good travel journals, you will find that Georgia is covered there, a lot is written about it [focus group with experts].

In general, participants of the study have noted that Georgia appears quite often in the Russian media. However, its coverage projects a rather negative image. At the same time, more materials appear on Georgia as a tourist destination and also as a country that is experiencing reforms.

3. General attitudes toward Georgia as a country

The results of representative surveys of the Russian population demonstrate that the attitude toward Georgia is stable: key figures remained unchanged over the last three years, the share of positive and negative attitudes toward Georgia is quite stable, and both opinions are equally widespread (see Table 2).

However, since 2009 Georgia is leading in the polls as the country with the most unfriendly attitude toward Russia (see Table 3).

	Jan10	Jul10	Nov10	Jan11	Jul11	Nov.11	Jan12	Mar 12	May12
Very positive	3	3	2	3	2	4	2	1	2
Mostly positive	29	37	32	36	35	35	34	30	36
Mostly negative	38	33	36	33	36	34	36	38	36
Very negative	17	14	15	13	14	11	12	12	12
Unable to answer	13	14	14	15	13	17	15	17	15

Table 2. What is your general attitude toward Georgia now?

	May 05	May 06	Aug 07	Mar 09	May 10	May 11	May 12
Georgia	38	44	46	62	57	50	41
The U.S.	23	37	35	45	26	33	35
Latvia	49	46	36	35	36	35	26
Lithuania	42	42	32	35	35	34	25

Table 3. Name five countries that you believe are the most unfriendly toward Russia? (the answers are ranked along the last measurement)

Experts explain that this rating was constructed by the media and is actually far from the real picture.

All these enemies, they are quite virtual and far from real. The enemies, listed in this table, are in fact not enemies in their essence [focus group with experts]

In the middle of 2012, Russia does not have a clear enemy. The ones listed here are probably just convenient for our government [focus group with experts]

Most of the listed countries represent our former republics. This explains a lot about how the media forms the information landscape and how our foreign policy works. These people are victims of the TV, which formulates our position [focus group with experts].

The attitude toward Georgia as an unfriendly country is, first of all, a result of the 2008 conflict, and, secondly, of Saakashvili's policies of distancing Georgia from the Soviet past, which is perceived negatively in Russia.

With the arrival of Saakashvili, the situation has only become worse. Georgia has emphasized that it does not want the Soviet Union to be restored. The present rating is a reaction to this policy. [focus group 2]

Georgia's presence on this list is a kind of an echo of the previous conflict [focus group with experts].

Georgia's economic situation is perceived ambiguously. On the one hand, respondents note that there is a positive tendency and that the country is being modernized (represented by the growth of entrepreneurship, investments, construction, tourism, intensified international links). On the other hand, there is a feeling that Georgia's economic indicators (average wage, per capita GDP etc.) are still far from the Western standards and make the country similar to the CIS states.

In terms of the economic development it seems that Georgia is even closer to Russia than to the CIS countries... Judging by recent developments everything was restored there after 2008 due to the foreign aid [focus group 1].

Judging by how often Georgia is mentioned to be contacting with the West and cooperating with other countries, there is a feeling that its economic situation is improving. This does not only reflect itself in wages. [focus group 1].

From an economic point of view, Georgia remains to be a poor country at the level of Ukraine [focus group with experts]

Reforms of government institutions (anti-corruption measures, the police reform) were often mentioned by respondents. There are perceived as of Georgia's most important achievements. At the same time, the success of these reforms is regarded as one of the causes for "complicated" relations with the Kremlin: Georgia represents a very uncomfortable example, in comparison to which Russia's own record looks rather unimpressively.

I heard that the police have been reformed and that there has been a very successful reform against corruption [focus group 1].

According to the news the country is conducting large-scale reforms, the level of corruption is being reduced, everyday corruption has been eradicated (traffic police, police, kindergartens). They say that there is still corruption at the top, but in everyday life it has almost disappeared. The buildings that are constructed for the police have glass walls, they are transparent, which means that everybody can see what they do... [focus group 2].

3.1. Relations between Russia and Georgia

Russian-Georgian relations are perceived by the Russians as being problematic, controversial, and reduced to a minimum in recent years. The 2008 military conflict, a complicated visa regime, remote geographical location, difficulties with transportation hinder the dialogue between the two countries.

Georgia is perceived to be far from Russia because of the 2008 military conflict. Today they increasingly follow the West's policies [focus group 1]

Our people know little about this country and when two societies do not communicate, they began to create myths about each other [focus group 2].

Participants of the study noted the existence of "myths", which are created in relation to Georgia and Russia. Myths significantly complicate dialogue between societies and cultures.

Our government often creates certain mythical cleavages within the society along different lines. This happens because it is much easier to deal with a split society. This is politics... [focus group with experts].

The Russian-Georgian relations have collapsed due to the lack of political and economic interest to each other and low importance of mutually beneficial relations for both sides.

For Russia the topic of Georgia occupies the 200th place, hand-gliding is on the third (laughing), while the European Commission's investigation of monopolistic practices – this is important. In other words, economic interests are important for them... [focus group with experts]

There is no serious reason for normalization of Georgian-Russian relations and there is little incentive for their development. Saakashvili is not very interested in Russia, and the revival of interest is only possible in case of a leadership change [focus group with experts].

If Saakashvili is close to the U.S. and pursues liberal policies, then he does not conform to Russia and does not want to be close to it [focus group 2].

Therefore, the main reason why the relations have deteriorated is the lack of mutual interest between countries at the political level.

3.2. Perceptions of Mikheil Saakashvili among the Russian Public

Mikheil Saakashvili is perceived by the Russians as a young, proactive, Western-oriented leader.

His political orientation is rather pro-Western and liberal-democratic... [focus group 2].

One of Mikheil Saakashvili's achievements is his ability to sell his reforms at a great price and for a long time. The reforms, in my opinion, achieved moderate success. In terms of his skills in selling himself he is an undisputed leader. [focus group with experts].

The 2008 military conflict made a negative impact on Saakashvili's image. This is indicated by the ratings of Presidents from 14 December 2009 "...the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev enjoy the strongest support of the Russians among the CIS leaders (33 and 28% respectively). They are followed by Presidents Ilkham Aliyev of Azerbaijan (6%), Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov of Turkmenistan (5% each), Kurmanbek

Bakiyev of Kyrgyzstan (4%), Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia (3%), Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine (3%), Emomalii Rahmon of Tajikistan –and acting President of Moldova Mihai Gimpu (2% each). The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili enjoys the lowest confidence rating among the Russians – only 1 % of the population trusts him”⁴.

Impulsivity, tendency to change earlier decisions are listed among Saakashvili’s negative qualities.

Saakashvili had frequent mood shifts. He adhered to one point of view and then to another. Or then he chewed his tie [focus group 1].

He still cannot understand whether they are allied with NATO or whether they are with Russia [focus group 1].

Some Russians believe that there is a personal animosity between Vladimir Putin and Mikheil Saakashvili. They see it as the main problem in setting the agenda for bilateral relations.

I have a feeling that there is some personal enmity between Saakashvili and Putin and that while they are both in power positive developments are unlikely [focus group 2].

In general, the Russians are curious about the modernization effort, undertaken by the President of Georgia and are interested in his personality and events in the country. At the same time, the 2008 conflict has made a significant negative impact on his image.

3.3. Attitude toward the August 2008 conflict

The 2008 war is considered to be the most important event, the one that the respondents remember first when Georgia is mentioned.

Georgia is seen to be far from Russia due to the 2008 military conflict [focus group 1]

We remember these events because we were already adult then. They were happening before our eyes. And this was not simply a gas dispute; this was a real war [focus group 1]

⁴ Source: official website of the VTsIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=12881>. Data from 14 December 2009.

A war cannot be forgotten quickly, it is a question of time... [focus group 1]

Respondents are interested in how the military conflict was interpreted by the press. They understand that information sources pursue their own interests. In addition, the Russians fear that after the 2008 war the attitude of Georgians toward Russia will become worse.

I have Georgian friends in Moscow. They are very kind and hospitable people. Nevertheless, since the 2008 conflict I have an equivocal feeling. Today I am not as confident that people in Georgia will be as friendly to me, when they find out that I am Russian. There is a feeling that after the 2008 war this will not be the case [focus group 2].

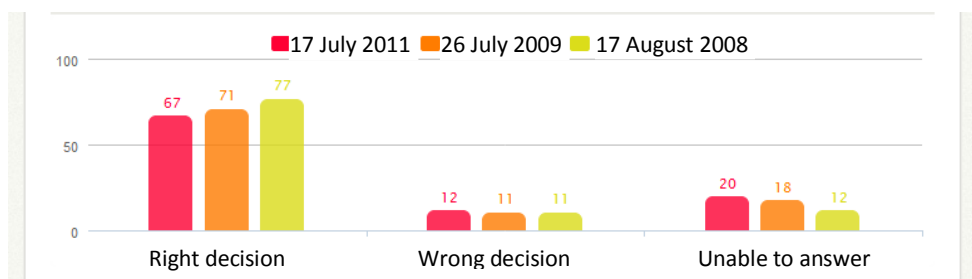


Figure 1. Russia took an active part in the 2008 conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia. Do you think Russia made a right or wrong decision by participating in this conflict?

«Three years after the Five Day War around Tskhinvali, the majority of Russians are confident that Russia had to intervene in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and then also recognize the independence of South Ossetia. However, considering the dynamics of polls, people are now less and less confident that Russia made a right decision and also more often find it difficult to make a clear-cut assessment»⁵

Participants of the study explain the decrease in confidence in Russia's actions as follows:

Enough time has already passed for the passions to subside. Now it is possible to make a sober assessment of the situation and look into other points of view [focus group 2].

⁵ Public Opinion Fund's (FOM) website, <http://fom.ru/globe/10123>. Source: Dominants Project, Fomnibus survey, 17 July 2011. Percentage of all respondents.

The participants demonstrated different attitudes toward the causes and nature of the military conflict. The majority of experts believed that the conflict was inevitable and irreversible.

This war was ignited, and it was planned for a long time... Russia and Ossetia provoked this conflict in order to steal the money for the subsequent reconstruction of Ossetia [focus group 1]

Everybody knew that a war is looming. The only question was when exactly it would start. Experts knew that it would happen [focus group with experts]

Experts and students were afraid to express a clear opinion on who was the perpetrator of the conflict. Rather they presented the different points of view on this problem.

I read in one of the Western journals that analyzed this conflict: the first impulse was from the Georgian side, but it was no coincidence that Russia reacted so quickly. Putin's approval rating was falling at the time, so an image of an enemy was necessary to consolidate the society around a strong leader [focus group 2].

I am not interested in politics; I did not pay much attention to this war, and I know little about it [focus group 1].

The following figures 2 and 3 demonstrate how little Russian citizens know about the status of South Ossetia and their low ability to assess whether it was necessary to recognize its independence.

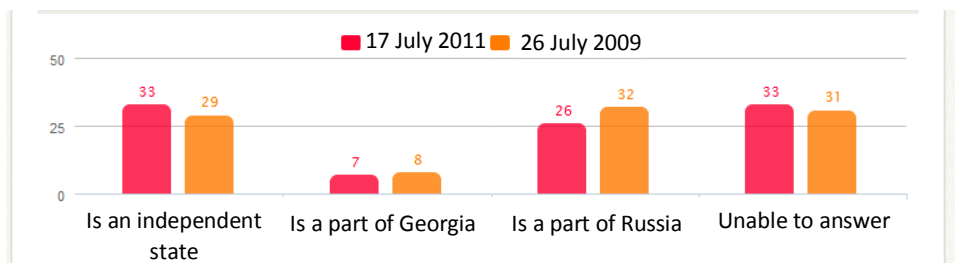


Figure 2. Do you think South Ossetia is actually an independent state or is a part of some other country? If so, of what country – Russia or Georgia?

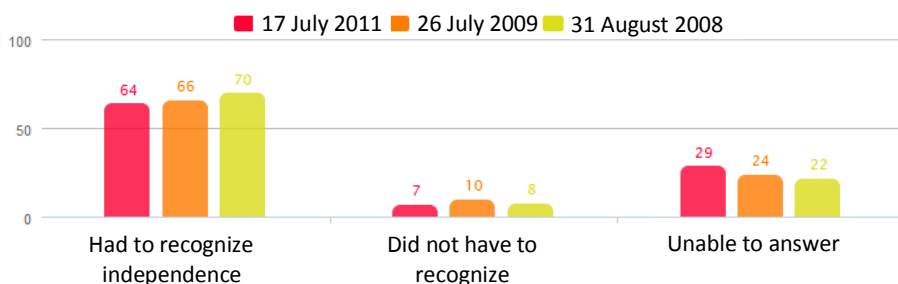


Figure 3. South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia. At the same time, Georgia does not recognize independence of South Ossetia. Russia has recognized independence of the Republic of South Ossetia in 2008. Do you think Russia was right when it recognized the independence of South Ossetia?

4. The prospects of Russian-Georgian relations: the dialogue between societies and cultures

In general, participants of the study have a positive attitude toward the citizens of Georgia as a people. They describe them to be emotional, hospitable, friendly people, who value family traditions.

The people of Georgia, as any southern people, are friendly, hospitable; they are winemakers... [focus group 2]

They have a special attitude toward marriage. If they married once, then it lasts forever. We have a different, simpler culture. [focus group 1]

There are also a number of stereotypes, relevant to the perceptions of Georgians by Russians: the image of a Georgian taxi driver, and of a distinctive “Georgian nose” among others.

There is a feeling that they still drive our Russian Ladas there [focus group 2].

We have a feeling that a Georgian is more likely a man, than a woman. We imagine Georgian men and see them as emotional and we don't imagine women... [focus group 1]

We see Georgians here, the way they behave on roads, taxi drivers, for instance. Therefore, I can guess how they behave [focus group 1]

The nose is a feature that can help you recognize a Georgian [focus group 1]

In general the Russians are interested in visiting Georgia and in communicating with people and their culture:

I would like to see how the reforms were carried out, what life is like there... [focus group 1]

They have ancient traditions and culture – this is very interesting! [focus group 1]

We should not forget here that people are different in general. We see taxi drivers here, who do not behave appropriately, but there are also other people, doctors, for instance. It is not possible to judge only on the basis of these taxi drivers [focus group 1]

The young generation perceives Georgia as a place for active tourism: cultural experiences, sports, beach resorts.

First of all, Georgia for me is a place for tourism, skiing and sea resorts. I plan to go there to see what it is like [focus group 2]

For me Georgia represents the South, warmth, good food, and small cozy towns. [focus group 2]

Since the times of the USSR Georgia has managed to preserve its mentality, authenticity and diverse culture. I want to go there. It is interesting [focus group 2]

Apart from that, Russians have concerns, connected with the tragic events of 2008:

After the 2008 events if they see that you are Russian, they can maybe beat you up. People are diverse there, so you don't know whom you will get in touch with... [focus group 1]

The future of Georgian-Russian relations is perceived as uncertain. Participants of the study do not make any forecasts, but they agree on one thing: despite the current political differences and lack of positive incentives, there is a potential to revive the dialogue between cultures and societies that can be initiated from the bottom:

Cultural exchanges, private contacts are very important. If societies will communicate between each other, people on the top will understand that it is necessary to maintain the connection [focus group 2].

Revival of resorts, tourism is what can unite us... [focus group 1]

Two measures are seen to be the most appropriate to facilitate the resumption of dialogue between the two countries:

From the side of Russia it is the simplification of the visa regime for the citizens of Georgia.

Today for the Georgians to get into Russia is as easy as for me to get to Mars. This is a complete disgrace [focus group with experts]

From the side of Georgia it is the abolition of the law “On Occupied Territories”. According to this law, any Russian in Georgia, being suspected of crossing the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the 2008 war can at any time be arrested and put into a Georgian prison.

If the government will abolish this law on territories, if the visa regime will be facilitated, then it will be easier for people to communicate and there will be full-fledged dialogue between cultures [focus group with experts].

5. Georgia as seen on the Russian Internet forum

We decided to draw on the materials from a Russian Internet forum⁶ in order to obtain additional information on Russian attitudes toward Georgia, which was chosen as one of the forum’s discussion topics.⁷

⁶ The website <http://www.lovehate.ru> was founded in 2003. It boasts 228,522 Russian-speaking users, most of whom live in the Russian Federation. 114, 627 of the registered users are male; 113,895 are female. There are 71,758 discussion topics on the site with the total of 940,162 posts. Any registered user can create a discussion topic. Those interested in the topic voice their opinion that must fall into either “I love” or “I hate” category. The forum allows to identify the participants’ gender, age, and place of residence through the information entered in their profiles.

⁷ <http://www.lovehate.ru/Georgia/1>. 33 people participated in the discussion of the topic on Georgia.

People who hate Georgia

On, 07/11/03

I hate Georgia and everything about this retarded country and its ugly people!

Erikababy, 06/04/06

There is nothing to love it for. Our country did a right thing by rejecting their wine and that mineral water of theirs...They have to be slaughtered. They want us to pull out our troops, but we will stop their wine exports. And what an insolence their government has to go after Russia. No, I won't visit Georgia; they don't like Russians there, and we don't like them either.

John700, 10/04/06

I hate them because Georgians are a stupid people. They are bit higher than apes in the evolutionary hierarchy. If we isolate Georgia from the world community for 10 years and then take a look at what would happen to them, rest assured there will be practically no Georgians left. They will do each other in for a piece of spoiled meat. I suggest Georgia be designated as a national park. There people will have a chance to observe prehistoric lifestyle in the 21st century...

The opinions of the forum's participants generally reflect the attitudes of the Russian public toward Georgia and its people. Most of the forum's participants display positive attitudes. They outnumber those with negative attitudes 2 to 1.

	"I love Georgia"	"I hate Georgia"
Number of posts	30	14
Number of participants	29	14

Table 4. The participants' responses on the topic of Georgia⁸

The following table (Table 5) reveals the topic's relevance in the aftermath of the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict: most of the responses in both categories appeared in 2009 and 2010. The number of comments has been declining in the last two years. The most likely explanation for these dynamics is that as the 2008 conflict is fading from people's memories, the interest in the country also declines.

⁸ The site's creators developed the so-called "love index", which reflects the ratio of positive to negative comments on a given topic. On the topic of Georgia it is equal to 2.14 (30/14).

Year	The number of “I love Georgia” posts	The number of “I hate Georgia” posts
2006	2	2
2007	2	0
2008	3	4
2009	5	4
2010	10	2
2011	5	1
2012	3	0

Table 5. The number of posts on Georgia over the period of 8 years.

There is a trend among the first 2006 and 2007 posts: those who have personally visited Georgia express mostly positive opinions, while those who have never been there tend to perpetuate common ethnic stereotypes.

It is the second year of my parents’ work contract in Georgia, so I have already visited the country 8 times and will keep coming back. I don’t like it when people who have never met Georgians describe them as unworthy...

[Female, Russia, Orel, 18 years old, posted 06/11/07].

Our country did a right thing by rejecting their wine and that mineral water of theirs... No, I won’t visit Georgia; they don’t like Russians there...

[Female, Russia, Moscow, 19 years old, posted 06/04/06].

The participants that left positive comments emphasize the beauty of Georgia and the hospitality of its people.

You know, I have been there numerous times and besides the beauty of Georgia as a country (enough has been said about it), I was struck by the incredible hospitality the Georgians display. I had heard about it before, of course, but when you are seeing it for the first time... see, when I was taken to strangers’ homes, they treated me as if I was their daughter!!! I did not feel alien or unwanted anywhere... This is just great!!! Even the poor will always offer you some tasty treat and will start asking you about your country and yourself... It is so delightful. I am happy every time I visit this wonderful country, the country where there’s always warmth, light and joy!

[Female, 20 years old, Russia, Smolensk, posted 02/28/08].

Cultural memories were also created through passing of personal stories from one generation to the next.

... my dad told me how wonderful the country is; we read Rustaveli together; he told me about a restaurant in Gori... Of course, I am not talking of cognacs and wines, I mean the spirit of the country!
[Female, Russia, Moscow, 28 years old, posted 08/11/08].

The older forum participants nostalgically reminisce of the Soviet Georgia and negatively react to recent changes.

Yes))) ... I dislike Georgia... there is not a trace of Georgia that I remember left... Tbilisi of my youth is nowhere to be found... that's how it's been for the last 20 years... and I don't like the modern Georgia!
[Female, Russia, Moscow, 36 years old, posted 08/19/11].

The younger forum participants view recent changes in Georgia more positively. However, the Russians note Georgia's low standard of living.

About 10 years ago, I would never have said that I love this country... But now my attitude has changed dramatically. The Westernization that Georgia has gone through has completely changed this country. And although the people's living standards still leave a lot to be desired, in other respects, Georgians have progressed significantly.
[Male, Russia, 26 year old, posted 02/21/12]

There is something I like about this country. Yes, it's poor and the standard of living there is low, but it's amazing what the country has accomplished in the last 6 years. The level of corruption is quite low (especially in comparison to Russia); it is easy to do business there; a lot has been invested in Georgia; the police doesn't go to war with its own citizens but fights crime; there is at least some order in the country.
[Male, Russia, St.Petersburg, 20 years old, posted 10/31/10].

The largest number of posts appeared in 2009 and 2010 in the aftermath of the 2008 conflict. On the whole, comments left during that period reveal that Russians clearly perceive Georgians as two groups: "the regime" and "the people". The latter are treated with affection and compassion, while the former evoke discontent and aggression.

The people are good. The president is lousy.
[Male, Russia, Moscow, 43 years old, posted 07/26/10].

...most of all, I'm annoyed by this country, or its government, rather. They set themselves up as a democratic state while persecuting

Ossetians and Abkhazians. Saakashvili deliberately pits Georgia against Russia, and the Georgians believe him...

[Male, Russia, 20 years old, posted 07/16/10].

The Russians are critical of both Georgian and Russian authorities that, in their view, complicate the relations between the two countries.

I have nothing but brotherly love for Georgia and its people, but I hate the government... both Russian and Georgian ones. How can they start the war between two brotherly peoples?

[Male, Russia, Kazan, 18 years old, posted 06/09/10].

Generally, I am tolerant of all people, but I am especially distraught and confused over the confrontation with Georgia. The Georgian government is ruining the entire historical record by trying to set the two brotherly peoples against each other; these are the peoples that have been coming together since time immemorial, the peoples that share a common religion... I only hope that the government will be replaced, and the relations between our countries improve.

[Male, 19 years old, Russia, posted 07/26/10].

The views expressed on the website have confirmed the conclusions made by focus groups (on the perceptions of Georgian hospitality and the country's beauty, as well as on the youth's positive assessment of Georgian reforms). Besides, some additional information was gathered. It related to the positive opinions of those who have previously visited Georgia as opposed to those who have not been there but formed their opinion by simply reproducing common ethnic stereotypes.

Another important conclusion is that Georgians are perceived to be divided into two diametrically opposed categories – “the people” and “the regime”. The former category is treated with tolerance and understanding, while the latter is viewed with displeasure and apprehension. All in all, Russians do understand the necessity of creating more trusting relations between the two countries and believe that the tensions between the countries' leaders ought to be diffused.

6. The movie *Love with an Accent* as an attempt to restart the cultural dialogue (based on the analysis of reviews on www.afisha.ru⁹)

Rezo Gigineishvili's film *Love with an Accent* appeared in Russia's movie theaters at the time of the Georgian parliamentary elections. The film's several story lines are linked by two countries – Russia and Georgia – and love. The *Afisha* reviews are positive: 4.3 out of 5 points.¹⁰ The data in Table 6 confirms the generally positive view of the film: positive reviews outnumber negative almost 10 to 1.

Number of positive reviews	Number of neutral reviews	Number of negative reviews
46	6	5
for the total of 57 reviews		

Table 6. The breakdown of reviews of the film *Love with an Accent* on www.afisha.ru

The movie reinforces the favorable image of Georgia as a country of rich cultural traditions, picturesque landscapes, friendly and gifted people. On the whole, it is capable of motivating the viewer to visit Georgia as a tourist.

Having watched the romantic movie Love with an Accent, which I enjoyed tremendously, I got an idée fixe to head for the Black Sea toward the Caucasus Mountains to ponder life and meet open and kind-hearted people who greet their guests like heroes and worship women.
[Female, Moscow, 28 years]

Many of the site visitors point to the commercial side of the film, which is not always approved of by the viewers.

An incredibly kind, moving, and cheerful movie. You should definitely watch it. And with a girl! With the girl you love! Perhaps I would change the movie title to "I love you, Georgia."
[Male, Moscow, 23 years old]

⁹The *Afisha* website (<http://www.afisha.ru>) was founded in November 1999. It is currently the most popular website in the movie industry. It is visited by over 4.5 million people a month and 1.3 million people a week. Movie pages account for almost half of the site hits (40%). The site visitors are evenly split between men and women; 68% of them are below 35. The visitors' income is at or above average. 33% of them live in Moscow, 9% in St. Petersburg, 3% in Novosibirsk, 2% in Yekaterinburg, and 54% in other Russian cities.

¹⁰ <http://www.afisha.ru/movie/210818/reviews/>. Retrieved 10/20/2012

*A movie is shot like a pretty commercial about Georgia.
[Female, Moscow, 30 years old]*

The reviewers refer to the constructive side of the film as well. They see it as an attempt to restart the cultural dialogue between the two countries.

The movie turned out great. I would describe it as a sort of an ode to the Russian-Georgian friendship, since our nations have always been together. I hope that after this movie the new rapprochement is close at hand.

[Men, St. Petersburg. 30 years old]

Such a movie is actually needed in order to correct the mistakes of politicians. I believe that this movie really can diffuse tensions between our once very friendly countries.

[Male, Moscow, 27 years old]

7. Georgian Parliamentary Elections: a brief analysis of the Russian blogosphere¹¹

The Russian media extensively reported on Georgian parliamentary elections. The reports were mostly informative and delivered the news that Mikheil Saakashvili's party had lost the elections. For the most part, the coverage lacked emotional component. However, Saakashvili's statement on Putin's reaction to the election results has prompted reaction that highlighted the tense relations between the two countries. Saakashvili was quoted as saying:

I have heard that our northern neighbor is happy, and Vladimir Putin, whose troops have occupied 20% of our territory, has been actively praising our elections...I would like to tell him that this happiness is hasted, since a precedent of change of power near his borders by elections, through free and democratic process, is not good news for him - for a person who is willing to maintain authoritarian ruling."¹²

¹¹ The Internet content obtained through Yandex blog search under a keyword "Parliamentary Elections in Georgia 2012" is discussed here. The analysis includes the review of blogs and Russian mass media portals.

¹² This quote appeared in many Georgian, Ukrainian, and Western Internet publications, for instance: <http://www.arminfo.am/index.cfm?objectid=09E911D0-19C4-11E2-8487F6327207157C>

Russian bloggers offered varying interpretations of Georgian parliamentary elections. One of the most-read Russian bloggers (drugoi.livejournal.com) has offered such commentary:

*It's amazing: the ruling party lost, but everyone talks of Saakashvili's moral and political victory. Mikheil has indeed won by not turning the elections into a shameful farce with "carousel" voting, ballot stuffing and illegal campaigning, as it was done in Russia very recently.*¹³

The media coverage has generally had two focal points.

First, there were some attempts to interpret the election results. For instance:

*The opposition victory indicates that Georgian society demands change.*¹⁴

Second, there were attempts to make predictions on potential Russian-Georgian cooperation in light of the opposition victory. One example of a consequence of the new political climate is the renewed talks on Georgian wine exports into the Russian Federation.

*Russia's Chief Sanitary Inspector Gennadiy Onishchenko is ready to meet Georgian wine manufacturers, whose products have been banned in Russia since 2006.*¹⁵

8. Conclusion

Georgia is seen by Russians as a country focused on the West, with a significant political and economic activity, but at the same time it has the image of a belligerent, conflicting and unpredictable region.

Georgia is frequently mentioned by the Russian media. However, it is portrayed in a specific way in order to create a negative image of the country. Positive materials gradually emerge: on Georgia as a country of reforms that is also an attractive tourist destination.

Reforms of public institutions (anti-corruption measures, police reform) are perceived by Russians as one of the main achievements of the country. However, the success of the undertaken reforms is one of the reasons for complicated relations with the Kremlin: Georgia appears to be an

¹³ This quote was reposted on many Internet sites. drugoi.livejournal.com has 51,200 readers.

¹⁴ <http://www.rbc.ru/> on 10/03/2012

¹⁵ <http://www.aif.ru/> on 10/08/2012

uncomfortable example, in comparison to which Russia's own record looks rather unimpressively.

The Russians are curious about the modernization effort by the President of Georgia, are interested in his personality and developments in the country. The 2008 conflict made a serious negative impact on the image of the President and the country. These events are the first that come into mind when Georgia is mentioned.

The Russians have a generally positive attitude to the citizens of Georgia, describing them as emotional, hospitable, and kind people, who value family traditions. There is an interest in making tourist trips to Georgia and in communicating with people belonging to its culture. In the perception of the younger generation Georgia is an attractive tourist destination, with diverse cultural activities, sports, and sea beaches.

Despite the existing political differences between Russia and Georgia and the lack of institutional incentives for cooperation, there is a potential for a revival of the dialogue between societies and cultures, which can be initiated at the grassroots level. Thus among the most appropriate measures to facilitate harmonization of the dialogue between the two countries the following ones were mentioned: the simplification of the visa regime for the citizens of Georgia from the Russian side, and: the abolition of the law "On Occupied Territories" from the Georgian side.

III. APPENDICES

Guide for the focus group with experts

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

For the moderator: try to set up experts for a meaningful discussion. Advise them that each opinion is important even if the participants do not agree with each other.

- Greetings, thanks for taking part, introduction of the moderator and purposes of the roundtable.
- Rules: there are no right and wrong answers, please do not interrupt each other. Recording. Confidentiality guarantee. Duration (about 1.5 hours).
- Introduction of the participants (name, affiliation, research interests).

2. The CIS countries and the situation in Georgia (30 minutes)

- How would you describe the current trends on the post-Soviet space? What do these trends suggest? What might be their consequences? What countries represent the key points of this space? Are there any new coalitions? Why did they emerge?

- How would you describe Georgia's standing within the post-Soviet space? How did it change in the last 10 years? In the last 5 years? In the last year? Why did these changes occur?

3. Georgian-Russian relations (50 minutes)

For the moderator: try to formulate your questions in the most problematized way, taking into account the context of the discussion.

- How would you describe the relations between Georgia and Russia in a historical perspective? What key dates have to be mentioned? How did these relations change over time?
- How would you assess the events of August 2008: what happened, could these events be prevented? What is your personal opinion on these events?
- What mistakes did the governments of Georgia/Russia make in your view?
- How do you assess Georgian-Russian relations now?
- What do you think are the reasons that hamper normalization of relations between Georgia and Russia?
- Do you think that Georgia's economy is affected by the confrontation between Georgia and Russia?
- Do you believe that private interests of political elites make an impact on political and economic relations between Russia and Georgia?
- Does Georgia pose a threat to Russia? If so, what kind of threat and in what circumstances?
- What common interests, in your opinion, exist between Russia and Georgia that can become a basis for dialogue and rapprochement?

Thanks and the end of discussion

Guide for the focus group with students

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Greetings, thanks for participation, introduction of the moderator and purpose of the meeting.
- Rules: there are no right and wrong answers. Recording. Confidentiality guarantee. Duration (approximately 2 hours).
- Introduction of the participants (name, age, hobbies).

2. The CIS countries and the situation in Georgia (20 minutes)

- What does the CIS acronym stand for? What associations do you have with it? What countries were part of this union? How and what was it formed for? Why and how did it break up?
- **The sorting exercise:** *hand out stickers with the names of CIS countries to the participants and ask to divide them on a flip chart into groups according to the most important principle. This task should be done collectively. Ask why the division occurred along these lines and ask about Georgia's standing in particular. Then ask to make another division along a different principle.*

3. The image of Georgia as a country (40 minutes)

- **The collage exercise:** *hand out several journals and scissors to the participants. Ask to make a picture under the name of Georgia out of the clippings. This task should be done collectively. Then ask to explain every detail of the resulting picture.*
- How would you describe the current standing of Georgia? How did it change over the last 10 years? Over the last 5 years? In the last year? What are the reasons for the changes?
- Where do you get information about this country from? Do you trust this information?
- Have you been to Georgia? Why? What impression did it make on you?
- What do you think about Georgia's
 - People
 - Customs, culture
 - Food
 - Education
 - Political situation
 - Currency, economy
 - Stereotypes

4. Russian-Georgian relations (30 minutes)

The historical perspective exercise: draw a line and mark its end with the current date, August 2012. Ask the participants to mark the most important historical events in the relations between Russia and Georgia on this axis. This task should be done collectively. Ask to explain each date along the axis.

- How would you describe the relations between Russia and Georgia in the historical perspective? What key dates should be mentioned? How did these relations change over time?

- How would you assess the events of August 2008: what happened, could these events be prevented?

- What mistakes did the governments of Georgia/Russia make in your view?

- How do you assess Georgian-Russian relations now?

Projective method: What animal would you compare Georgia and Russia with? Why with these ones?

- How will Georgian-Russian relations develop?

- What do you think are the reasons that hamper normalization of relations between Georgia and Russia?

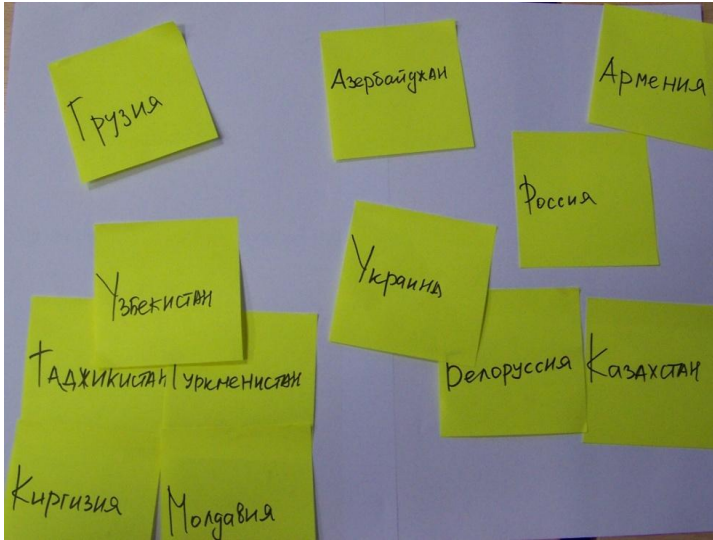
- Does Georgia pose a threat to Russia? If so, what kind of threat and in what circumstances?

- What common interests, in your opinion, exist between Russia and Georgia?

Thanks and the end of discussion

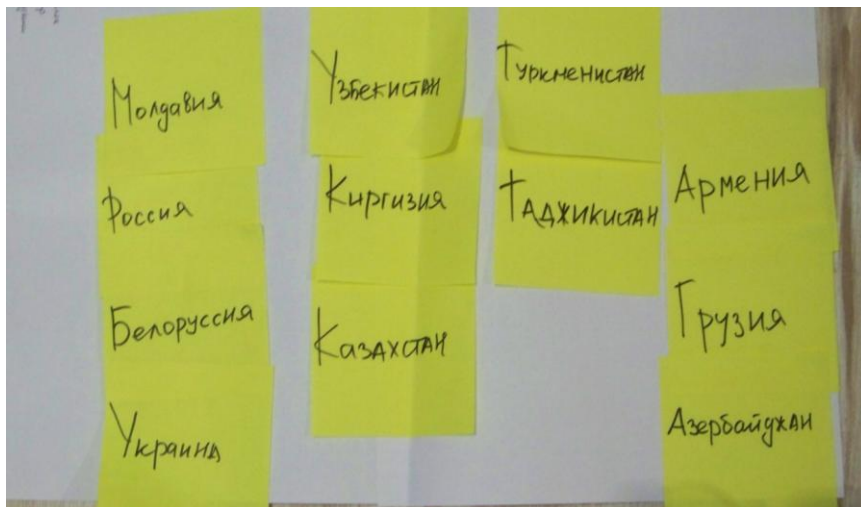
Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine

The sorting exercise. Countries of the CIS



Materials of the second focus group. First-year Master's students, course: public politics.

Sorting exercise. Countries of the CIS.



Collage exercise on the subject of Georgia



Empirical Research “**Perception of Russia and Russians in Georgian Society**” was conducted within the frames of the program funded by the *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts*. The survey was carried out by the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation in 2011.

Leader of the research team: Professor George Khutsishvili (International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation)

PERCEPTION OF RUSSIA AND RUSSIANS IN GEORGIAN SOCIETY

DESCRIPTION OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Objective of the given qualitative research was to conduct an in-depth study of a number of issues related to the perception of the image of Russia by different strata of Georgian society, including independent experts and IDPs.

Method: To study expert assessments at an in-depth level, we used *individual focused interview*. The *focus-group* method was used to conduct survey with different strata of public, including IDPs. In both cases the same questionnaire was administered (find annexed).

The sample: Expert assessments were studied by interviewing experts working in the field of our interest (8 experts altogether). The interviews were conducted in spring 2011.

Due to the nature of discussed problem, focus groups were formed according to participants' age, because it was quite probable that people with different experience of living in the USSR would differently perceive Russia. Therefore, research results enabled us to check the accuracy of the given hypothesis. The age groups included an old age group, which mostly lived in the former USSR (got education and worked there), middle age group, that received education in the former USSR, and worked in both periods - in the Soviet state as well as in the independent Georgia; the other group of those who got education in the former USSR but worked in a new independent state; and youth who were born after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (current students).

To cover all the strata of the population focus-group discussions of the issues in question were also arranged with IDPs. In the latter case, focus-group respondents were selected from two different waves of IDPs ("old wave" IDPs who were displaced as a result of the Georgia-Abkhazia war in 1992-1993 and the "new wave" IDPs, displaced after the August war in 2008).

To meet the minimal criteria for the comparability of participants' responses, two focus-groups (7 persons in each group) were conducted with each category of population. In total 84 persons participated in focus groups interviews. Discussions in focus-groups were also held in spring 2011.

In parallel with the main research, TV programs about Russia were subjected to content analysis. In particular, information programs of the three main TV channels broadcasting nationwide (Public TV, Rustavi 2, Imedi) were analyzed during two weeks.

THE MAIN FINDINGS

1. Perception of the Russian government's policy towards Georgia

It could be generally stated that there is a social consensus in Georgian society around the evaluation of the Russian authorities' policy towards Georgia. The opinions of independent experts in all the age groups and IDPs coincide with the official view held by Georgian authorities: The signs of conflict could be traced back to the late 1980s, when the objectives of Georgia's democratic development turned out to be incompatible with Russia's political and geostrategic objectives. 'As a result, since the beginning of the post-Soviet period, Russia has been pursuing the policy that aims to undermine Georgia's statehood'¹⁶.

Independent experts expressed the same opinion: 'The disintegration of the Soviet Union created foundation for confrontation between Russia and Georgia'; 'Russia's policy aims to undermine Georgia's statehood. It aims at transforming Georgia into an obedient implementer of Russia's policy in the Caucasus'. According to experts, Russia's policy (just like the policy of any other country) is based on a national project or on the perception of one's own role in today's and future world. The essence of Russia's policy is clearly reflected in V. Putin's almost everyday rhetoric: 'Russia is rising from its knees'. Since Putin has many times declared that the dismantling of the USSR was the biggest mistake, we can be certain that the given rhetoric, among other things, implies striving towards the restoration of influence in the post-Soviet space.

Experts also refer to an interview with Dmitry Medvedev, where he names five principles that are the foundation of the Russian Federation's external policy: 'The world should be multi-polar. A single-pole world is unacceptable. Domination is something we cannot allow. We cannot accept a world order in which one country makes all the decisions, even as serious and influential a country as the United States of America . . . there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests.'¹⁷ The context makes it evident that this geographical undefined area also includes Georgia. All this clearly points to the fact that among other things the Russian national project involves the restoration of influence in the post-Soviet space, which strongly contradicts Georgia's national interests and its political priorities – diversification of external political relations and striving towards integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. Georgia's multi-vectored policy contradicts the political and geostrategic interests of Russia.

¹⁶ Report by the Government of Georgia on the aggression by the Russian Federation against Georgia. – Tbilisi, August 2009. – C. 114.

¹⁷ Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Russian Television Channels. August 31, 2008.

<http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/1276>

According to one of the experts 'The ruling elite of Russia perceives the post-Soviet space as a former Soviet Union. Therefore, its policy towards Georgia could be described as the attitude of the center to the periphery, which is getting out of its control. Attempts to preserve influence in Georgia and strengthen it in the future, turned out to be unsuccessful. This is what the reason for aggression is.'

"Soviet" and "aggressive" . . . All the interviewed experts agree that these attributes characterize the policy of the Russian ruling elite in relation to Georgia: 'The Russian policy can be described as 'soviet' with the only exception that in the past Russia played the role of 'big brother' whereas now it plays the part of 'strong neighbor'. The thing is that the style of thinking, which is using a force based approach, has remained the same. It is believed that you can't enter into debates or defend your interests in the face of a strong party, whereas you can treat a weak party in any desirable way. Since Russia is big and strong, and we are weak, it can neglect us.' 'Russia treats Georgia like 'a small dog' which has decided to yelp at big Russia, and should be punished for that.' Russia pursues aggressive policy with all the post - Soviet states and the countries of the former Communist block, which is caused by its attempts to maintain influence. At the same time, she uses carrot and stick policy. If the carrot does not work, it has to use the stick, that is use aggressive measures». Thus, all the interviewed experts describe the policy of Russia's ruling elite as 'soviet', as the center's attitude to a periphery, which tries to get out of its control, and this is followed by aggression on the part of Russia. Correspondingly, the main reason for aggression is that Georgia's multi-vectored policy contradicts Russia's political and geo-strategic objectives; what we observe is the incompatibility between the Russian and Georgian national projects. As for Russia, it is a 'usual soviet way of responding to events.'

The Georgian experts' opinion is in line with the point of view of the Russian politologist A. Epifantsev, who draws historical parallels and argues that history often repeats itself. 'Attempts of the Caucasian states (that were of certain interest for Russia) to pursue 'multi-vectored policy' always had a negative outcome for those involved in the multi-vectored game. The sad story of the Georgievsk treaty is one of the examples. In line with the principles of multi-vectored policy, Georgia signed an agreement on non-aggression with Russia's enemy – Turkey . . . which led to one of the biggest catastrophic events in the history of Georgia – Georgia's defeat in Krtsanisi battle and Persian invasion of Tbilisi. Several years later, similar actions were taken by King of Imereti Solomon, who, after becoming a protectorate of Russia and getting, through this, under Russia's control, started negotiations with Turks to get the same kind of protectorate. As a result of like multi-vectored policy, he lost his power and fled to Turkey. As a result, the Imeretian kingdom was abolished and later

developed into Kutaisi guberniya . . . History, especially Caucasian history, normally repeats itself.¹⁸

Finally, consensus around the reasons of confrontation between Russia and Georgia does not seem to be limited to Georgian public. Many experts, including Russian political scientists share Georgian experts' opinion that the core of the problem is incompatibility of the two countries' national projects. 'Russia cannot give up its positions in the South Caucasus and Tbilisi (hopefully at this stage) - give up the idea of 'Great Georgia'. 'There is a saying : The strongest wins the battle' – says the well known Russian politologist S. Makedonov. Russia could not give in because, otherwise, she would have stopped being a super power, or even a developed state. At the same time, this is the question of stability in the North Caucasus and the entire South of Russia.'¹⁹. These words echo Georgian experts' opinion not only in terms of the main reason for confrontation between the two states.' Here we can clearly observe the Soviet thinking style – a tendency to use an approach which is based on force, which emphasizes the advantages of force.

Georgian experts' ideas about the main reason for confrontation between the two states is shared by the majority of American experts. Russian-Georgian relations 'are in crisis largely because of the friendly relations between Georgia and the US . . . political and military leaders of Russia are irritated by Georgia's pro-western orientation'– says the American politologist Чарльз КИНГ²⁰. According to Andrey Tsigankov, professor of San-Francisco University, the roots of the conflict are the disintegration of the USSR, and, as a result of this, the strengthening of political ambitions of the ethnocratic elites in the former Soviet states. Today's situation is complicated by the fact that Russia is not going to abandon its international positions and, in particular, its positions in the Caucasus. The Kremlin is persistent in pursuing its own interests in the region and demonstrates increasing readiness to defend these interests in a friendly or aggressive way²¹. According to Svante Cornell, Research Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Professor at Johns Hopkins University, the main reason is Georgia's attempts to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions, which is strongly opposed by Russia.²²

Finally, it could be stated that this is the position held by official Moscow. Anyway, the main tool used by Russian anti-Georgian propaganda is the threat arising from Georgia's joining NATO, which is interpreted as the Georgian

¹⁸ Андрей Епифанцев. Абхазия: необъяснимая щедрость бытия.

<http://www.apn.ru/publications/article22606.htm>

¹⁹ Сергей Маркедонов. Грузия. Проклятые президенты.

<http://www.apn.ru/publications/article24110.htm>

²⁰ <http://www.iamik.ru/?op=full&what=content&ident=30171>

²¹ <http://www.iamik.ru/?op=full&what=content&ident=30171>

²² <http://www.iamik.ru/?op=full&what=content&ident=30171>

authorities' desire to gain the West's trust by creating tension zones at the southern borders of Russia and establishing military bases nearby.

Opinions of interviewed students with no experience of living in the Soviet Union actually coincide with the experts' evaluation of the Russian policy towards Georgia. Most students describe it as aggressive, imperialistic, rough, unfair, driven exclusively by one's own geopolitical interests and implemented through rough, undiplomatic methods. As for the reasons for the confrontation, most students believe that the main reason is the pro-western course pursued by Georgia, which is against Russia's interests. That is why it uses any means to bring Georgia back under its influence. Some respondents also said that this is caused not so much by the state interests of the ruling elite but by the personal interests of the ruling elite, which needs 'enemy image' embodied in Georgia. Respondents explain that the creation of external enemy image is a well tested method of any political elite which aims to internally integrate the country, and, therefore, preserve power. A somewhat different opinion was expressed by one of the students: 'The way you approach the issue, the perspective you hold is what really matters. Being a Georgian, I see that Russia's policy is really aggressive. On the other hand, the Abkhaz can also say that we have captured Abkhazia. At the same time, Russia insists that it defends the Abkhaz and South Ossetian population.' It is worth mentioning that this statement is in line with the opinion expressed by A. Sakharov, who called Georgia 'a small empire.' Therefore, the opinions expressed by interviewed students with no experience of living in the Soviet Union (at the age of sufficiently developed consciousness), actually coincides with the opinion of interviewed experts.

The other age groups, composed of the people aged 35-44 (those who received education in the Soviet period), 45-55 (in addition to getting education in the Soviet period, they also acquired some work experience) and people above 60 (those who spent most of their lives in the Soviet Union) demonstrated quite a big difference in opinions. In these groups only some respondents describe Russia's policy as aggressive, driven by geopolitical interests, interests of a 'super power' and empire, or 'driven by confrontation with opposition to the west' or 'competition with the US'. 'Russia cannot accept Georgia's independence. It needs the Black Sea; it needed to provoke Georgia.' Some of the participants noted that Russia's ' is a reaction to the erroneous policy of the Georgian authorities 'Do not touch me or I will crush you!'.

What is most important that some respondents in all age groups express the following suspicion: The external confrontation is not real; it could be just an agreement. In reality, there is no real hostility between the Russian and Georgian authorities. It is just a deal. Georgia has been allowed to 'revile' Russia on the condition that it would meet all Moscow's demands. It has to be noted that this opinion is shared by many respondents belonging to the

mentioned age groups. The opinion like this has not been expressed by the interviewed experts or students.

As for the evaluations given by both waves (new and old waves) of IDPs, they, mainly, overlap with the opinions given by students and experts, and, therefore, the official point of view demonstrated by Georgian authorities. Both, new and old wave IDPs believe that Russia is an invader', 'Russia's policy is imperialistic', 'Russia is an aggressor', 'Russia's policy is a 'policy of grab', but there is also a personal factor - the Russian authorities do not recognize the Georgian leaders.' There is also unanimity in the explanation of the reasons for opposition: 'NATO military basis in Georgia do not suit Russia and it does anything it can not to allow this to happen'; 'Russia needs to maintain influence over Georgia.' The only difference in opinions demonstrated by old and new wave IDPs is that the evaluations made by the latter are more categorical. This group expressed the opinion very different from that of the other groups: 'Russia pursues aggressive policy not only in relation to Georgia but also in relation to its own population.' It does not seem to be surprising, since these are the people who became direct victims of the war in August, 2008. However, as we will see below, when, instead of Russia's authorities respondents had to evaluate Russians, the same group stated that 'there is no confrontation between the peoples and only the governments of both states are guilty for what happened.'

To summarize the above:

- Evaluation of Russia's policy towards Georgia given by experts, young people and IDPs, actually coincides with the official position of the Georgian government;
- Quite a large number of respondents aged 35 and above doubts that Georgia-Russia relationships are really hostile. They think that the parties have just made a certain deal. Georgian authorities obediently comply with the Russian authorities' desires. Respondents base their judgment on the following observation: All the facilities important to Georgia have become Russia's property. This happened before and also after the August 2008 war.
- Those belonging to the new wave of IDPs expressed a totally different opinion: 'Russia's policy is aggressive not only in relation to the Georgian authorities, but, also, in relation to its own population.'

2. Perception of the Georgian government's policy towards Russia

According to the interviewed experts, despite the fact that since the first day of declaring independence Russia related policy has been Georgia's one of the most important strategic objectives (freeing oneself from Russia's influence) it has

been implemented in different ways. Before 2004, the policy was rather cautious, but persistent; however, it sometimes, became radical, like in the years 1991 and 1992-1993. 'After the Rose Revolution, accompanied by euphoric atmosphere and people's unlimited trust in the new government aiming to implement reforms and modernize the state, in the Georgian establishment inspired by US support, formed an ideal of «boldness, permissiveness and invincibility. That is why Georgia's policy towards Russia 'was and still is unrealistic'.

According to all experts, the Georgian and Russian authorities, are, in general, very much alike. 'It can be said that we have the autocratic governance in both countries and both went through a similar experience. V. Putin has controlled the Mass Media and businesses, arrested those who did not obey, restricted civil rights and freedoms and took a maximal revenge over his opponents. Political prisoners appeared in the country. M. Saakashvili did the same.' 'Both rulers' - added the experts 'have tried to form mass youth organizations to strengthen one's own position. They are both involved in active propaganda to stir hatred, reinforce fear and create 'enemy image.'

Almost all the interviewed experts believe that at this stage the Georgian government does not have more or less clear, established policy in relation to Russia. 'Neither Russia nor Georgia has made an effort to draft a neighborhood policy. Everyone knows the European neighborhood policy, but like attempts have not been made by Russian or Georgian authorities.' As the experts say, their statement is based on the following: 'It does not appear in any of the dimensions, on any of the channels through which the public receives information on state policy.'

It was also stated that Georgia's policy is determined by motivation to express the interests of the radical wing of the West. Georgia has been given the role of 'a bad boy' who voices the ideas politically correct western politicians are reluctant to voice.

Finally, part of interviewed experts is sure that the Russia related policy of the present Georgian government is determined by their personal interests – desire to preserve power and some internal factors, 'since the creation of the image of permanent threat coming from outside has been used as the major consolidation mechanism for the domestic political situation.' 'The Georgian authorities need enemy image; Russia brilliantly plays the relevant role. The more prominent this image is the more it suits the authorities.' Note that like opinion was expressed by students' group but only in relation to Russian authorities.

Interviewed students describe Georgia's policy as 'bold', 'too ambitious for such a small country', 'erroneous', 'rigid', 'emotional', 'not thought through in advance'. Students' opinion coincides with that of the experts who think that

‘in the Georgian establishment, inspired by US support, was formed an ideal of boldness, permissiveness and invincibility.’

Many respondents in student groups also think that the anti-Russian propaganda, attempt to bring the two peoples into confrontation pursues the only objective – preserve power and shift attention from unresolved domestic problems to external threat. ‘ This process, called the formation of enemy image, makes it possible to prolong the period of being in power. The authorities try to divert people’s attention from internal problems, from the reality, so that people think about what is going in Russia instead of thinking about the problems in their own country.’ Also, respondents said that the Georgian authorities try to provoke Russia and its aggressive response to evoke sympathy in the West, form a negative attitude towards Russia and make them think that the ‘existing tension results from confrontation between the two presidents.’ Finally, almost all the students share the opinion that Georgia is not even trying to resolve the conflict.

As already noted, the upper age groups demonstrated a striking difference in opinions: Quite a large number of respondents thinks that the opposition between the two countries is just a deal. Those respondents who do not share this opinion blame Georgian authorities for bringing tension into Georgia-Russia relations. They perceive the Georgian government’s policy as ‘ irresponsible’, ‘erroneous’, ‘hysterical (by the way, on both sides)’; they say that ‘ it looks as if the Georgian and Russian authorities compete with each other in showing others that they are worse than the other side.’ The respondents think that such relationships reflect much more negatively on Georgia .’ ‘ You should find a political language Georgia will benefit from.’ It has been also noted that Georgia has turned out to be a ‘small change’ in the relationship of the two big states. ‘ Our authorities obediently execute all the orders. We have found ourselves in the role of blind executors. The ant bites the bear to help the US accomplish its own ambitions.’

Finally, respondents in these age groups were unanimous in stating that the conflict is purely political, that the confrontation had the least impact on population: ‘People go on living like before and are still friends as they were before.’

Georgia’s policy towards Russia was positively evaluated by only several respondents out of the group aged 35-44. They noted that ‘Georgian government’s policy is correct, because aggression should be responded with aggression.’

As for the IDPs (including those belonging to both waves), they demonstrated an unanimously negative evaluation of Georgian authorities’ policy towards Russia. ‘ Instead of trying to establish a normal dialogue, they only insult Russia and its government. A small country should not have like relationship with a huge neighboring country.’ The respondents were also unanimous in seeing conflict settlement as a necessity.

Thus, the following summarizing conclusions could be drawn from the above:

- Most respondents, including experts, evaluate Georgia's policy pursued in relation to Russia as erroneous and challenging. A different opinion is held by several respondents belonging to the group aged 35-44. They believe that the policy pursued by Georgian authorities is correct, since aggression should be responded with aggression.
- Interviewed experts and a number of students think that the policy pursued in relation to Russia by Georgian authorities is driven by personal interests, that is preservation of power as well as internal factors (Georgian authorities need to create enemy image, and Russia is extremely suitable for this role). Almost all students believe that Georgia is not trying to resolve the conflict;
- The majority of interviewed experts says that the policies (both foreign and domestic) pursued by Georgian and Russian authorities are very similar to each other. Both countries have the autocratic style of governance; the authorities in both countries use confrontation to strengthen their own power;
- Quite a substantial number of respondents in the upper age groups thinks that there is no real opposition between the authorities. It is just a deal.
- IDPs emphasize the necessity of conflict resolution.

3. Mistakes made by the confronting parties

All the interviewed experts believe that mistakes have been made by both parties. Moreover, they describe Georgian-Russian relations as a long chain of mutual mistakes that has finally developed into an armed conflict.

However, most experts think that the Georgian side made many more mistakes. 'When one of the parties cannot achieve a desired result this already means that some mistakes have been made.' 'Since the existing situation is much more unfavorable for Georgia than for Russia, we should think that we have probably made many more mistakes.' Georgian authorities should have considered Russia's international role, resources and political potential while forming their policy. At that point they refer to the Baltic States. Despite their serious problems with Russia and inner ethnic problems, these states managed to find a constructive way of releasing themselves from Russia's influence. Georgia's policy had the opposite objective. We started to openly confront Russia. 'One of the most serious mistakes of the Georgian authorities was that they hoped Russia would easily give up Georgia, so they chose direct confrontation even though this way was disadvantageous for Georgia in any respect.' 'Georgia's

mistake was that it chose open confrontation without having a serious support.’ Experts believe that in this sense ‘Georgian authorities successfully executed the order of Russian authorities.’

There is also a different opinion according to which most mistakes have been made by Russia and the biggest of share of responsibility lies with this party. It has been mentioned that Georgians, the Abkhaz and Ossetians contribute to the existing confrontation; however, the share of responsibility is proportionate to the size of the Geographical territory taken by each party.’

According to one of the experts, the mistakes of the Georgian side are caused by low level of political culture, as a result of which ‘we have not managed to develop a more positive external policy product in our relationship with Russia.’ When listing the mistakes made by the Georgian authorities the experts mention unrealistic ambitions, undemocratic way of decision making, i.e. the subjective factor.

As for the mistakes made by Russian authorities, it has been said that ‘it could have used softer methods in relation to Georgia. This was Russia’s main mistake.’

Some experts agree with the opinion domineering in the official Russian discourse according to which August 2008 was marked the ‘revival of Russia’: Russia is able to take an independent decision without waiting for approval from the other super-powers. Russia showed the world its readiness and capacity to defend its interests, also by military force. It justified its ambitions of a great super-power, demonstrated to the world that the South Caucasus is still a zone of its special interest and domineering influence. Another thing is that in the modern world, a state is considered strong or weak depending on its ability to solve its problems using political and international legal instruments rather than military force.

The students hold a different opinion. They believe that mistakes were made by present Georgian authorities, which led to the cold war with Russia. Among the mistakes they name ‘a challenging declaration - we will return Abkhazia and South Ossetia’, ‘insulting statements made by Georgian authorities about underdevelopment of Russia and the Russian political elite,’ ‘diplomatic mistakes’, ‘transferring strategic facilities to the enemy, even after the war in August 2008’. ‘People thought that we were restoring the constitutional order and returning Abkhazia and Ossetia, but we were, actually, defending ourselves. This evoked fear: Since we were defeated once, it will be like this also in the future.’ ‘The Georgian governments’ external policy is definitely wrong: they have no ability to maneuver and act using diplomatic methods.’

According to the students Russia had not made a mistake, as she managed to accomplish its political and geostrategic objectives. ‘Russian authorities did what their country needed’, that is they managed to pursue their own interests.

Georgia's joining NATO and the EU is solved in favor of Russia (at least in short-term perspective).

Russia managed to 'legalize' the military bases removed from the territory of Georgia. 'The only loss she incurred was the loss of international image; however, it is not very much worried about that because she possesses all the leverages that could be used to prevent all the possible negative consequences.'

Respondents also noted that they did not support the establishment of deep, friendly relations between Georgia and Russia. They just find hostility and cold war with a neighboring country – unacceptable. Georgian authorities' policy should have been directed at the establishment of positive, constructive relations 'since you can do nothing about the geographic factor.'

Respondents belonging to the second age group (aged 35-44) generally share the experts' opinion saying that mistakes were made by both parties. Some respondents believe that Russia made much fewer mistakes. Almost all the respondents believe that the August 2008 events were the main mistake, when Georgia found itself 'in the trap skillfully laid by Russia which, intentionally or unintentionally favored Russia's political interests'. However, there is an opinion that the consequences would have been the same in any case, as Georgia lost Abkhazia in the period of Shevardnadze's careful diplomacy.

Similarly to the interviewed experts and students, respondents of this groups also believe that the Georgian government's biggest mistake was its rigid policy 'You can't speak with Russia like this', 'a radically different policy is needed.' As for the mistakes made by Russian authorities, some respondents said that 'invading the Georgian territory in August 2008 was a mistake.'

Respondents in these two groups note that the opposition between the two states did not influence relationship between the Georgian and Russian peoples: 'These people love each other and wait for the restoration of good and friendly relations they had in the past'. This makes the given group different from the group of students who do not support the establishment of friendly relations between Russia and Georgia.

Similar opinion is held by the respondents of upper age groups (above 45) who exclude ethnic hostility between the two nations. They believe that while struggling with each other, the political elites of both countries 'neglect the interests of their population.'

When touching upon the mistakes made by the confronting parties, respondents again demonstrated difference in opinions. Those who perceive the Georgia-Russia opposition as a deal, exclude any mistakes. 'Georgian government did not make mistakes. They were excellent in implementing all the instructions received from Moscow.' 'The Georgian authorities passed to Russia all the important facilities and property. Why did they do that if it was their enemy?' '

They probably improved roads to ease the movement for Russian tanks.’ ‘The regions adjacent to the border are neglected. All this has been agreed. If the authorities had behaved differently, Saakashvili would have stopped being President long ago.’

Other respondents share the opinion of the rest of the interviewees, including the experts, according to which the main mistake of the present Georgian government was an open confrontation with Russia, its inflexible, rough and undiplomatic policy. Renaming Tskhinvali region into South Ossetia, and Kodori Gorge into Upper Abkhazaaia was another big mistake. Other mistakes were closing down Ergneti flee market and invading South Ossetia in 2004. Conflict in South Ossetia was actually resolved, but the present government ‘brought everything to the starting point’ in 2004. Finally, part of respondents thinks that ‘neglecting the opinions of your own population should be considered another mistake.’

As for the mistakes of the Russian government, the majority in this group also thinks that they have not actually made any mistakes. According to one of the respondents, recognition of Abkhazia and South Osswetia in the status of independent states was a bad mistake. Other respondents expressed a different opinion: ‘Russia’s mistake was that it did not give us Abkhazia back. This is what determined our orientation towards the US.’

IDPs share the other respondents’ opinions. They also think that an open confrontation with Russia is the Georgian government’s main mistake. They also noted the unrealistic and illusory expectation of western assistance in this context. ‘The Georgian government’s mistake was a false hope that Russia would allow us to return South Ossetia.’ ‘It was a mistake to rely on G. Bush’s assistance.’

As a result, Georgia did not receive MAP ²³ and finally spoiled its relationship with Russia.’ Most respondents say that ‘tension in relationship is caused by impulsive and thoughtless steps made by incompetent Georgian authorities.’ And again, the August war is named as the biggest mistake; it was a mistake to respond to Russia’s provoking actions. However, other opinions were also expressed, like: ‘The August war was not the Georgian government’s mistake. They had the right to act on their own territory’.

Old wave IDPs are definitely pessimistic about the possibility of renewing negotiations between the two states as well as the likelihood of achieving positive results. ‘In 1992-1993, Russia promised that it would return us to our homes. 20 years have elapsed since then and we still live in exile. Dialogue becomes senseless if one of the sides (Russia) fails to fulfill its responsibilities under the agreement.’

²³ NATO Membership action plan

As for Russia's mistake, IDPs from Abkhazia talk about persecution and deportation of Georgians. 'By doing so it demonstrated its aggressiveness and proved the appropriateness of the Georgian policy and its attempts to join NATO.'

New wave IDPs also emphasize the rigidity of Russia's policy. 'It was Georgian authorities' mistake to look down on Russia and make insulting statements about Russian politicians.' Some said that Georgian authorities had not made any attempts to actually resolve conflict. 'The Georgian tradition of showing respect to neighbors has existed since Agmashenebeli's times²⁴, when the Georgian farmer was not allowed to slaughter a pig if s/he had a Muslim neighbor. If your actions are perceived as insulting by your neighbors, it becomes necessary to develop a more flexible policy!' They were unanimous in their opinion that it was a big mistake to close down the Ergneti flea market, which was followed by deterioration of already 'warlike' relationship between Georgians and Ossetians and the interruption of communication. 'If, as declared by the Georgian government, the flea market was closed down because of smuggling, they should have strengthened control instead of closing it down, which deprived the Georgians and Ossetians of opportunity to communicate.' Another big mistake, mentioned by participants was that the Georgian government declared that they did not need the Russian market.

New wave IDPs also named 'weakness of the Georgian armed forces' and 'chaos during the war' as serious mistakes of the Georgian government.

Asymmetry in relations is considered to be Russian authorities' mistake by new wave IDPs. It is reflected in the following: 'Russian politicians ignore Georgian authorities', 'humiliate their Georgian colleagues', 'Russian politicians refuse to hold negotiations with Saakashvili, which is insulting for the whole nation', 'Jirinovsky's insulting statements, like Georgia without Georgians'. Respondents also named the following mistakes: Russia's 'aggressive', 'unfriendly', 'imperialistic' policy, 'illegal actions of the so-called *peacemaking* forces', 'holding Georgians hostage; tortures'. It was emphasized that Russia had been preparing for war in advance and provoked Georgian authorities.

The following summarizing conclusions follow from the above:

- Almost all the interviewed experts believe that mistakes have been made by both parties. However, according to the majority, the Georgian side made many more mistakes. This opinion has been shared by the rest of respondents, except students, who believe that mistakes have been made solely by Georgian authorities. Russia, on the contrary, managed to accomplish its political and geostrategic ambitions. In addition, quite a large share of the upper age group, suspecting a deal between the Russian and Georgian parties, rules out the existence of mistakes by

²⁴ Agmashenebeli – David the Builder – *authors comment*.

either of the sides, because the ‘Georgian side followed all the instructions of Russian authorities.’

- Apart from this group of respondents, all the other interviewees, including experts, regard, as a mistake, Georgia’s open confrontation with Russia and unrealistic, illusionary hopes for Western support. The war in August 2008, when Georgian authorities reacted to Russia’s provocation and, by doing so, deliberately or unintentionally contributed to the accomplishment of its political ambitions, is thought to be a major mistake. The majority of respondents thinks (this opinion is shared by almost all the new wave IDPs) that it was a mistake to rename Tskhinvali region into South Ossetia and Kodori Gorge into Upper Abkhazaaia, close down Ergneti flee market and invade South Ossetia in 2004. Part of respondents thinks that neglecting the opinions of your own population should be considered another mistake.
- Despite the fact that many interviewees assume the existence of mistakes also on Russia’s side, they all share the opinion expressed by students according to which because of the wrong policy pursued by Georgian authorities Russia managed to achieve its political and geostrategic objectives. As for the mistakes made by Russian authorities, some respondents think that it could have achieved its objectives using milder methods, therefore, without losing its face in the eyes of the international community. Old wave IDPs listed as mistakes persecution, and deportation of Georgian population. By using these measures it ‘demonstrated its aggressiveness and proved the appropriateness of the Georgian policy and its attempts to join NATO’.

4. Reasons impeding normalization of Georgia-Russia relations

Respondents ranked the factors impeding the normalization of Georgia-Russia relations in terms of their importance to arrive at the following order:

1. Kremlin’s imperial ambitions
2. Georgian authorities’ inflexible and inadequate policy
3. Recognition of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence
4. August war of 2008
5. Undemocratic regime in Russia
6. Personality factors (V. Putin, D. Medvedev, M. Saakashvili).

5. Influence of Georgia-Russia confrontation on Georgian economy

There seems to be a clear consensus around the given issue in Georgian society. All the respondents including the interviewed experts believe that confrontation between Georgia and Russia has an extremely negative impact on Georgian economy. As the experts say this negative influence has especially increased since 2006 and acquired a systematic and regular character. 'When the borders with a neighboring country are closed, it becomes clear that this will anyway have a negative influence on the potential of economic development.' 'All the countries establish trade relations with their neighbors. Because of embargo we have stopped importing to Russia our traditional products – wine, mineral waters, fruit, crops . . . ' Experts also note that we have a large diaspora in Russia, which could be more actively involved in business in Georgia, but political atmosphere restricts these possibilities.' 'Our President claims that we have only benefited from embargo on the import of Georgian products, by improving the quality of our exports, but it is another PR move.' The experts emphasize that the Russian market is extremely important not only for Georgia, but also for the entire world. 'The assumption that we can do without the Russian market is a pure self-deception.' 'The statement that a small country can do without the market of a huge neighboring country, is just absurd.' 'In addition to the market, there is a key issue of energy carriers, which, has been more or less compensated in a short term perspective at the expense of Caspian oil products. But in the medium and long term perspective, development of Georgian economy crucially depends also on the Russian market.'

According to experts, Russia is a big investor for Georgian economy. Russia's goal is to create a liberal empire and for this purpose it uses any forms of activity in the former Soviet Republics. There is the Kremlin behind all the large investments or a group associated with it. In this sense, Russia's impact on Georgian economy is negative. 'Despite verbal declarations about western orientation, Georgia's economy is actually Russia oriented. Excellent conditions have been created for Russian capital.' 'During the August were bombed Arabs' property, the Poti port and the German factory, but the war did not damage Russian constructions. This was the main indication for foreign investors.'

At the same time, 'Russian business in our country did not cause any additional problems despite the fact that their country was at war with Russia. This could have different explanations, but you can be sure about the following: Although Russian business has important economic leverages in Georgia, they still do not use them to the maximal point.'

It has been also mentioned that although, at this stage, there are no official trade relations between the two countries, because the Russian market is blocked for Georgia, statistics tells us the opposite: Russia is a large exporter of products from Georgia. It is among the top five exporters. Among importers is ranks second after Turkey, that is it still ranks very high.

All the interviewed experts say that Georgia- Russia confrontation cannot have any potentially positive influence on Georgian economy. They have only mentioned that ‘a lot of Georgian immigrants live in Russia, who support their families at home. In this respect we could talk about a positive impact as these people would not be able to find a job, otherwise.’

All the experts assume that the future of the development of Georgian economy largely depends on Russia. According to them, if the relations between these two countries are normalized and trade and economic relations are gradually restored, this will certainly have a positive impact on Georgian economy, since there are traditional ties between our countries. As stated by one of the experts ‘Only green vegetables exported to Russia, mainly from West Georgia, were 50 million worth, which is quite a big amount. I am saying this because it is something very few people know.’

According to experts, we realized only after the closure of the Russian market how important product awareness is. ‘Without product awareness it is difficult for us to promote Georgian wines and mineral waters (and, of course, other consumer goods) on the international market. They knew our products on the Russian market and we did not even realize how advantageous it was.’ ‘Russian consumers knew Georgia as a tourist country. What they spend millions on hoping for remote results already existed on the Russian market in a ready made form’. Experts think that it is not only the Russian market that Georgian economy needs. Also, all the post-Soviet space is much more important than European.’ ‘Firstly, they already know our products in the post-Soviet space; secondly, we had already more or less established ourselves on that market; thirdly, it is much easier to establish communication; fourthly, we are not able to meet all the European standards on the given stage; for this reason we have to select the markets with looser standards. Apart from this, there is customs control that facilitates relationship with the post-Soviet countries because of mutual interest. For example, despite the enforced agreement, to take some goods to Europe you need to take into consideration interests of several countries. All this proves that at this stage the post-Soviet space should be our main market.’

On the whole, similar opinions were expressed also by other respondents. According to the students ‘It took us very long to search for alternative markets for our products. The closure of the Russian market brought a lot of damage to Georgian economy.’ ‘Although the president denied this at the beginning, he finally admitted that closure of the Russian market it was a big blow for us.’ He, however, added that Georgia found the way out. Anyway, the Russian market was a big support for us because we exported most products to Russia.’ In the students’ group there are some respondents who share the President’s opinion that ‘the quality of Georgian products improved thanks to the Russian embargo.’ They, also, think that Georgian economy can develop

without the Russian market at the expense of tourism and the exportation of ecologically safe products.

Other respondents did not express any different ideas. All the respondents hold the opinion that confrontation between Georgia and Russia has an extremely negative impact on Georgian economy. 'It is obvious that the Russian market is important not only for us, but also for any country.' 'It's difficult for us find alternative markets. At the same time, Russia has not lost anything.' It has been noted that as a result of the closure of the Russian market many families found themselves below the poverty level. Some respondents also mentioned an extremely negative impact of the August 2008 war on Georgian economy, as a result of which 'Georgia is internationally regarded as an unreliable partner'.

Thus, having summarized the above, we could draw the following conclusions:

- All the respondents, including experts, think that Georgia-Russia confrontation has had an extremely negative impact on Georgian economy. Such negative influence have become especially strong since 2008, and acquired a systematic and regular character. There seems to be a social consensus around this issue in Georgian society;
- Large majority of respondents rules out any potentially positive impact of Georgia-Russia confrontation on Georgian economy. Only several students share the opinion that the quality of Georgian products has improved thanks to Russian embargo;
- Most respondents believe that Georgian economy declined as a result of Georgia-Russia confrontation; however, it did not have any effect on Russia's economy.

6. Impact of the personal interests of the political elites on Georgia-Russia political and economic relations

Most experts think that personal interests of the political elite definitely affect political and economic relations between the two countries. That is why a big share of strategically important facilities have fallen into Russia's hands. 'For example, the total energy system of Georgia has been passed to Russia and the reason is, first of all, personal interests.' 'Just because of their personal interests Georgian authorities face difficulties in relations with western businessmen, for whom, the reallocation of interests in a corrupt way, is unacceptable. On the other hand, Russian businessmen have nothing against 'black' money. On the contrary. They have developed excellent schemes for money laundering. For this reason, such relationship suits our authorities, who are also interested in corrupt deals. We can easily see the results: Georgia's energy system is totally under

Russia's control. It is clear that someone has taken a bribe, someone has demanded a share.'

It has been also emphasized that the political elites of Russia and Georgia 'need' each other to reinforce their power. 'During elections, a political figure or a political team often needs *enemy image*. Confrontation between Russia and Georgia often helps, in this respect, politicians of both parties.

At the same time, according to one of the experts, it often happens that the ruling teams of both countries pursue a thoughtless policy which runs against their interests. 'If we believe that government changes are really important to Putin, then how should we interpret the play staged by him? PR manager Saakashvili would find it very difficult to look for pro-Saakashvili arguments. Putin, Nougaideli, Burjanadze - three serious people (at least this is how they perceive themselves) made efforts to increase Saakashvili's rating. These are totally irrational actions. Unfortunately, our side does the same. The ruling team takes many actions against the interests of their own country. So, you can observe enough irrational actions on both sides.'

All the interviewed students assume that big politics is always driven by personal interests. 'The public might not be realizing this, but this is what it is - big politics is governed by personal interests of the political elite who has an enormous power. Due to this often suffer the country's and its population's interests.'

The students agree that 'the Georgian political elite was interested in the monopolization of imports, which enabled it to artificially increase prices. This does not suit the state, but meets personal interests. The same is happening in Russia.'

As for the second age group (35-44), it demonstrated difference in opinions. Similar to experts, most respondents think that 'the present situation is caused by personal ambitions of the two people.' They also share the experts' opinion according to which the majority of most important Georgian facilities has become the property of Russia. This proves that personal interests in both countries influence their bilateral political and economic relations. 'Why was Enguri power plant transferred? Why was the road to Kazbegi opened? Could it be anything else but personal interest?!' However, the other, smaller share of respondents says that 'it can't be only the personal factor.'

In the upper age group (above 45) most respondents share the opinion that political and economic relations between the two countries are determined by personal interests of the political elites. As already noted, an important share in this group assumes that there are actually no hostile relations between Russian and Georgian authorities, that all this is only a deal and that Georgian authorities obediently fulfill Russia's wishes. They say that it is otherwise impossible to explain the fact that 'all that has been sold in Georgia including strategic

facilities (also in August 2008), has been bought by Russia.’ ‘When you pass everything to someone who can’t stand you and fights with you, this could only mean that hostility does not actually exist’. Some radical opinions were also expressed: ‘ As a result of the five-day war, authorities made a lot of money. These were personal interests. They sold our country. Now the entire country is under threat.’ Respondents who did not share the opinion regarding a deal between the two countries, believe that the country became a victim of struggle between the two big states ‘We have US hegemony. Americans want to weaken Russia and reinforce their world dominance.’

The opinion according to which personal interests of the Russian and Georgian political elites have a great influence on political and economic relations between the two states is shared by IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Respondents also think that involvement in politics is very often motivated by the opportunity of promoting personal business interests. ‘Unfortunately, this is what reality is.’ Some IDPs believe that ‘certain people were financially interested in passing our territory to Russia.’

Having summarized the above we have drawn the following conclusions:

- All the interviewees , including experts, are sure that personal interests of the political elites in Russia and Georgia influence interstate political and economic relations. Moreover, most respondents believe that these are just personal interests that determine the given relations. Only a part of respondents, aged 35-44, does not accept the possibility that only the personal factor can play a determining role.
- The group of experts states that the ruling groups in both countries pursue a totally thoughtless policy that contradicts their own interests. Some respondents in the upper age group (above 45) explain their irrational actions by the fact that there is actually no hostility between Georgia and Russia and that Georgian authorities comply with Russia’s wishes.

7. Evaluation of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008: What happened and if it was possible to avoid the war

The experts showed disagreement in their evaluation of the August 2008 war. Part of experts believes that the main factor was Russia’s imperial ambitions, who tries to restore restore and reinforce its influence in the post-Soviet space. This is accompanied by difficult relations between Russia and the West. An additional factor was Georgia’s European orientation, expressed, in the first place, in its attempts to join NATO, which also caused Russia’s irritation. ‘Georgia, became a part of important projects on the transit of energy carriers

(Caspian resources) and took a clearly western orientation in its attempts to build the state'. 'Unrealistic, sometimes a shocking policy of Georgian authorities' was another important factor. For a number of years, Russia successfully used the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to exert pressure on Georgia. Respondents expressed the opinion that the August 2008 war would not have taken place if US relationship with Russia had been similar to what it is now. "We should not have behaved in a challenging way, of course, and should not have done what was not the right thing to do."

A similar idea was expressed by another expert who said that nothing particular happened in August 2008 except that the war that had been led by Russia against Georgia since 1991, escalated. Those events did not start in 2006, 2007 or 2008. It was Georgia's another attempt to get out of Russia's control but it used forceful actions. Russia, on the other hand, took fatal steps that entailed long-lasting negative results. All that is mentioned in the report of the H. Tagliavini commission, which has been 'forgotten' by both Georgian and Russian sides with no reason. What the report says provides the Georgian side with important arguments that could be used in international debates. It seems all that has been ignored only because on August 8, the Georgian artillery really opened fire in the direction of Tskhinvali . . .

It has been also mentioned that there was the Kosovo precedent, Russia wanted to respond to, especially after the 'Bucharest summit at which the West sent Russia a message perceived by her as a green light.'

The given group of experts believes that 'the Georgian side, that found itself in the trap not so skillfully laid by Russia, can hardly be called innocent. It was not difficult to notice that trap, but, unfortunately, not for the Georgian government . . .'

However, this group of expert gives a different answer to the question about the possibility of avoiding the war: 'Difficult to say. The Georgian side could have definitely done more; could have taken some other, more effective measures, but, yet, it is difficult to say what Russia would have done; whether it would have rejected her plans as a result of this or as a result of more serious international pressure. It was obvious that Russia was getting ready for this military action. That is why it is difficult to say whether she would postpone it for this or that reason or not. Therefore, you can't claim that it was possible to prevent the war.'

Part of experts said that the war in August 2008 actually took place between Russia and the West. 'There was a clash of interests between Russia and the West but the front line ran through the South Caucasus. They used the place, time and space where it was possible to stir conflict. These were Abkhazia and South Ossetia.' It was also said that 'the Georgian side made a fatal mistake by involving itself in Russia's game - a military conflict.' 'Georgian authorities did not manage to calculate the confronting side's resources, which was used by Russia for one's own benefit during the occupation of Georgia.' In response to

the question about whether it was possible to prevent the war, the answer was 'Sure!'

'Russia was not happy about the western policy, which ignored its opinion regarding NATO expansion, allocation of counter-rocket systems, reduction of military resources, etc. Russia had to overcome this kind of attitude that originated from the Eltsin period. For this purpose it had to show the world that it was 'rising from its knees' and that the West is not as strong as it thinks it is. For this purpose she inflicted a blow on the country which was called 'beacon' by the West and towards which the West was oriented. This is what happened in 2008. After that Russia started to wait for the West to respond. It is still waiting, but the West does nothing.' However, the response to the question about the inevitability of the war was different, again : ' If we assume that it was the war between Russia and the West, rather than Russia and Georgia, and Georgia was only the place where the front-line ran, then it becomes clear that it was impossible to prevent the war, unless the West had made some concessions. But the West did not make any concessions for the sake of Georgia. Moreover, it escalated tension. This war suited the West, i.e. the US.'

Finally, according to another group of experts, both countries moved in the direction of this war; both needed this war. 'Russia needed this war to punish Georgia and Georgia hoped to return its own territories through military actions.' Saakashvili was not able to realistically evaluate his own potential. There were all the signs of the preparation for the war. After the Rose Revolution the war rhetoric and propaganda were getting stronger. It was Saakashvili's big mistake to start military actions at the time of military training conducted by Russia in the North Caucasus where vast resources were mobilized. It was a trap you could see even with an 'unarmed' eye and Saakashvili should not have found himself in the trap.' 'It was the climax of Russian-Georgian striving for war. An obsessive idea of the two political elites.' For a number of years, militaristic attitudes were actively reinforced in Russian and Georgian societies. In response to the question whether it was possible to avoid the war, respondents gave the following answer: 'Only if the Georgian authorities' policy had been different from the very beginning. But it was possible to make some attempts even in July. The main mistake was the political course which was military oriented. The military budget was increased every year. What was that if not the preparation for war?'

Evaluations obtained from the experts could be broken down into three categories:

- Judgments made by some of the experts actually coincide with Georgia's official declaration which says that the signs of confrontation had been evident since the end of 1980s when the objectives of Georgia's democratic development became incompatible with Russia's political and geostrategic goals. As said in Georgia's government

report on the war in August 2008 ‘As a result, Russia, from the outset of the post-Soviet era, instituted policies aimed at undermining Georgian statehood’²⁵. However, some disagreements are also observed: Experts think that Russia used Georgian authorities’ mistakes to achieve its objective;

- The war of August 2008 was actually a war between Russia and the West. It was a new turn in the confrontation between Russia and Georgia which means that certain features of the ‘cold war’ were ‘reanimated’. It is interesting to note that a similar opinion prevails in the Russian discourse, according to which ‘August 2008 marked the revival of Russia. Russia is now able to take difficult decisions without waiting for approval from other super powers. Russia demonstrated to the world its readiness and ability to defend its interests, including the use of military force. There is, of course, certain divergence in the opinions about the strength and weakness of states in the modern world (the state that uses political rather than international and legal methods could be considered as strong). However, it is clear that Russia’s actions proved the ambitions of a super – power. It showed that the South Caucasus still falls under the sphere of its interests and domineering influence. Today, the presence of Moscow in the region has somewhat strengthened. It received the necessary institutionalization, lost, also, after the OSCE Istanbul Summit resolutions of 1999;
- Finally, there was expressed an opinion that both countries moved towards war and August 2008 was a sort of climax in Russia’s and Georgia’s striving for military confrontation;
- At the same time, the issue regarding the possibility of preventing this war caused disagreements even among the experts who gave an identical judgments of the events in 2008. They expressed radically different opinions: ‘Sure’ and ‘It was impossible’.

Evaluation of the war in August 2008 caused disagreement in the students’ group, despite the fact that all the interviewed were sure that ‘the war was a big mistake. It was a military conflict preconditioned by thoughtless policy, as result of which many people became victims and a territory of the country became occupied (including the territories that were not part of the so-called South Ossetia).

At the same time, the judgments made by a significant number of students, actually, coincide with the type of judgments made by the experts. ‘The political course taken by the Georgian government and oriented at the integration into NATO, and, in general, friendly relations with the countries hostile to Georgia,

²⁵ Report by the Government of Georgia on the Aggression by the Russian Federation against Georgia. – Tbilisi, August 2009. – C. 114.

did not suit Russia. Russia did everything she could to prevent that, including the use of force to stop the process.’ ‘This war demonstrated the policy of intimidation, directed at the prevention of Georgia’s integration into the western world’. ‘Georgian authorities responded to Russia’s provocation’. ‘Georgian authorities opened fire. Russia brought in its military forces, in response.’ ‘Georgia is a strategic partner of the US, which contains a real threat for Russia. That is why Russia’s reaction was aggressive.’

Opinions expressed by some interviewed students coincide with the official point of view: ‘Relationship became extremely tense. There were more and more provocations against Georgians from the Ossetian side. Georgian authorities decided to take necessary measures and restore the constitutional order on the given territory. However, they overlooked the possibility of Russia’s involvement.’ The students, also, added the following: ‘Our president sent to the line of fire almost unprepared young people as a reserve force. Many of them died. It was a real war – war from the air and our soldiers in the open fields became its targets.’

Some students share the experts’ second opinion according to which it was, actually, a war between Russia and the West. ‘Our government, who is almost a US vassal, was encouraged by the US to respond to the provocation, which was followed by Russia’s strong reaction.’ ‘Anyway, we found ourselves abandoned, no one supported us. Georgians risk their lives in international peacemaking operations, but no one will make like sacrifice for our sake.’

Finally, respondents expressed a somewhat different opinion. The given subgroup of students thinks that it was a preliminarily calculated step on the part of Georgian authorities, consequently, aimed at joining NATO. To become a NATO member you need an integrate country. ‘Therefore, it had to take some steps to either return South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia, which was unlikely to happen, or give them finally away. The Georgian government started the August war to solve the South Ossetia and Abkhazia issues. At the same time, they realized that they would not be able to win the war.’

There is another point to emphasize: All the students believe that the military conflict of August 2008 was of political nature. According to them, this is what makes this war different from the War in Chechnya, in which ethnic confrontation was an important factor.

Large majority of respondents in the other age groups shares the opinion that ‘Georgia responded to Russia’s provocation and started the war.’ ‘On August 5, the Russian armed forces were already in the state of readiness and evacuated the population. Despite this Georgian authorities still yielded to Russia’s provocation.’ ‘As a result of this, Russia accomplished its goal and Georgia lost part of its territory.’ ‘Our state attacked South Ossetia. Our soldiers died and the authorities arranged a concert next day.’ All the respondents believe that it was a big mistake made by Georgian authorities. ‘They should not have yielded to

provocation. This war saw a lot of victims.’ Part of respondents directly blames the President for stirring the war. ‘There was enormous tension and Michael Saakashvili sent the troops to restore constitutional order. Then he capitulated, but celebrated victory before they would bury the soldiers. He feels wonderful, now.’

Only several respondents in the upper age group (above 55) believe that it was confrontation between Russia and the US: ‘Georgian and South Ossetia became the victims of Russia’s and the USA’s interests.’ Some other respondents of the same age also stated that ‘the war brought one positive result. It revealed the real face of Russia and the world called it an aggressor.’

There is an unusual point we would like to emphasize: no other opinions were expressed in the upper age groups; however, as already mentioned, a large share of respondents of this age considers confrontation between Russia and Georgia to be a deal. At the same time, no one doubts that the August 2008 war was ‘real’. However, like doubts are expressed by many respondents in IDP groups (including the IDPs in both waves). However, opinions in the latter group differ with regard to the participants of the deal/game. In particular, IDPs from Abkhazia claim that it was a deal between Russia and the US: ‘War in Abkhazia, as well as the current war, both were a game.’ ‘Two big countries played a chess game. Kodori gorge was exchanged for Tbilisi.’ IDPs from South Ossetia think that it was an agreement between Russia and Georgia: ‘It was a preplanned scenario. Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand why Georgians so easily took many villages at the beginning. . . At the beginning, Russia did not seem to interfere . . . It was a staged play. Georgians did everything for the benefit of Russia. Coincidence of military actions with the Olympic games, was also planned in advance.’

As for the rest of the IDPs, they share the opinion that ‘Georgia yielded to Russia’s provocation.’ ‘We yielded to Russia’s provocation and found ourselves in the role of victims.’ Only several respondents out of the group of the new wave IDPs believes that the war took place because politicians did not manage to arrive at a common agreement.

Finally, all the interviewees, excluding a part of experts, believe that it was possible to prevent the war through ‘diplomatic means.’

8. Evaluation of possible threats coming from Russia

After evaluating the August 2008 events respondents were asked whether there existed threat from Russia, and if ‘yes’, what form it took and on what occasions. Most interviewed experts gave a positive answer to this question. Those experts, whose opinions coincide with the official point of view, think

that in 2008, Russia managed to accomplish only part of its objectives. For example, Georgia is still west oriented, Russia was not able to overthrow the government and bring to power the right person. However, it seriously shattered Georgia's positions in terms of the integration into the Euro-Atlantic space. Therefore, the threat of military conflict continues to exist. In this context, it is important to consider the following: 'After withdrawing its last military bases from the Georgian territory, it brought its military infrastructure back to 'the South Caucasus, and by recognizing independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the status of states, created a foundations for many coming years claim that it was defending recognized states. As for the legitimacy of the given argument, Russia is not very much worried about that.' It has been emphasized that the development of events depends on the world context, including internal development of Russia and Georgia, which means that this is a multifactor process. 'To accomplish its strategic objectives, Russia will not be stopped by anything.' Out of the experts sharing this point of view, only one believes that the probability of military conflict is not high, but it should not be ruled out. 'Any force-major conditions can increase the risk and cause military conflict again. Nothing can be ruled out when there are lots of weapons everywhere – in Tskhinvali, Abkhazia and here . . . Remember Chechkov: If there is a gun hanging on the stage, it is bound to shoot. So, we should be very cautious. The situation in the North Caucasus and between our members (meaning Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict) is complicated. The situation with Iran has become very risky.'

The risk of possible threat from Russia has been assessed as high also by the group of experts who states that the August 2008 war was the war between Russia and the West. 'If the West needs to give Russia another 'flick', the losing side will be Georgia, again. But since military threat does exist, it means that there are also other kinds of threats' (political, economic, and social). 'The armed forces of the enemy who are standing in the center of the country, can, theoretically, launch a wide-scale aggressive action against us, and, by doing so, create a serious danger for our sovereignty. However, the way it will be practically implemented depends on numerous factors. Today, such probability is not very high, but because of the existing conditions we belong to a high risk category. This creates an unstable situation in the country and, in the region, as a whole and impedes development in many directions – economic, social, etc.'

As for those experts who said that both parties were moving in the direction of war, and that in August 2008 confrontation between Russia and Georgia just reached its climax, their opinions diverged when it came to the evaluation of threats coming from Russia. In particular, it was stated that at present there is no threat coming from Russia, unless Tbilisi makes other mistakes and provokes Russia. 'To feel oneself comfortable Tbilisi always needs Moscow as enemy image, that is why it always uses provocations and blackmailing. But if it overtires, military aggression on Russia's part can be definitely expected.

Otherwise this is unlikely to happen, since Olympic games will be organized in 2014, followed by football championship in 2018; that it why Russia does not need war in the South Caucasus. So, another war does not suit Russia. However, Georgia might try to even more escalate relationship and provoke Russians to make certain steps in response.’ As for non-military threats, they could take the form of blocking Georgia’s actions at the international level, wherever Russia will manage to do so. If Russia joins the WTO, it will definitely try to block the issues related to Georgia.’ Respondents also expressed the opposite opinion: ‘It has always suited Russia to be at war before presidential elections. This could happen again given the pending elections. We cannot rule out threat only because the confronting parties do not take any measures helping reconciliation.’

Students’ opinions split in relation to potential threat coming from Russia. Some students believe that there is a big threat and that ‘we are under threat even today’, ‘we have always been under threat.’ ‘Situation will not normalize and problems will not be solved until the beginning of dialogue, until the politicians give up their ambitions and try to find a common language to solve vital problems.’

The rest of the students holds the opposite point of view and assumes that there is no threat of war at present, because ‘everything possible has already happened. If Russia starts war again, its international position will be shattered a lot; so, it will not make this choice. Russia can undertake some other actions, but not military ones.’ Another part of students says that today Russia does not pose any threat because of the lack of needed resources. ‘Russia is a huge country, but its economy has declined; at the same time, war requires vast resources. Nowadays, the economic situation is very bad in Russia; there are problems in domestic policy; there is permanent struggle for the division of spheres of influence. Given the above, Russia is not able to start war.’ According to another opinion, Russia no longer needs war. ‘It can use its agents and take Tbilisi without a single shot. Russia can select and support any suitable candidate from the Georgian political spectrum. War will be useless if the country’s president becomes the person who suits Russia.’

34-45 year respondents’ assessment of possible threats from Russia, basically, coincides with the students’ judgments. Two different opinions are observed also in this case. Some students think that the risk of military confrontation is quite high. ‘As long as Georgia strives to join NATO, Russia’s threats will exist forever.’ It was also stated that ‘Georgian authorities are disoriented, therefore it won’t be difficult for Russian authorities to provoke Georgia.’ The other part of respondents thinks that there is no threat of military conflict at present: ‘Russia has already accomplished its goals; therefore, we are no longer threatened by Russia.’

According to the respondents in the upper age group (above 45) the risk of another military confrontation is quite high. ‘Given the present government ,

there was and there will always be some threat.’ ‘If the situation does not change and relationships are not normalized, such a threat will continue to exist.’ ‘There is a danger of passing Javakheti to Armenia and Ajara to Turkey. All the rest has already happened.’

A similar opinion is held by IDPs. ‘There always exists threat from Russia.’ ‘This threat will increase if our government takes wrong steps; e.g. in relation to joining NATO, which irritates Russia most.’ ‘Stemming from the geographic location and the existing geopolitical situation, Georgia will always be threatened.’ ‘If the Georgian government does not stop insulting Russia, catastrophe is inevitable.’ ‘Threats do exist; Russia can instigate another provocation and find an excuse for sending its troops to Georgia.’

It could be concluded from the above that according to most respondents threat from Russia is quite realistic. Those who think that today there is actually no risk of military confrontation, found themselves among the minority.

9. Potentially common interests for Russia and Georgia

The next question to answer was the following: ‘Which, in your opinion, are the interests common for Georgia and Russia that could serve as a basis for dialogue and restoration of relationship?’ According to almost all the respondents these are, first of all, the issues of regional security. ‘Peace in the Caucasus is needed by Russia and Georgia as countries not as political regimes. Instability in the Caucasus is fatal for both countries. However, it is most important for Georgia than Russia, because we are a small country and Russia is big. Differently from us, events in the Caucasus do not have a direct impact on the people living, for example, in Siberia or Ural.’ ‘Objectively, stemming from its state interests, Russia is not interested in maintaining instability in the South Caucasus. It is interested in regulating conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh. As a result of the complicated situation in North Caucasus it is interested in maintaining peace and stability in the South Caucasus.’

According to experts, the next issue is related to the fight with terrorism. ‘Islamic extremism and terrorism is our common problem. It is the area in which we can cooperate and have to cooperate. Otherwise, neither Russia, nor Georgia will be able to cope with this problem.’

Respondents also think that these could be economic links and trade projects. According to one of the experts ‘Our common interest is to overcome the communist past, not only economically, but also mentally, which is quite a difficult problem. Mental heritage is not so much felt in Georgia as in Russia. Nevertheless, we cannot say that we have totally freed ourselves from this heritage. For example, the removal of the Stalin monument in Georgia is a best

expression of communist mentality; it speaks for its reinforcement rather than of overcoming this type of mentality. In Russia the monuments are preserved not because it is their history but because leaders are respected. . The Mausoleum continues to exist. Here the Stalin monument was removed only because a man, who 'envisages' an invisible monument erected in his honor, did not find it acceptable.'

However, all the experts doubt that in today's circumstances it will be possible to normalize Georgia-Russia relations. 'It has not been possible, so far, to take the first steps to start dialogue.' Some experts even think that normal relationship cannot be established. 'Given the present authorities, you should not expect any restoration of relationship. Regulation of relationship between the regimes existing in both countries cannot take place in the nearest future, because it is unlikely that democratic forces will come to power in Russia in the near future. To restore relationship at least one of the parties has to become democratic. This is unlikely to happen in Russia in short-term perspective. There is only one way out – Georgia has to become democratic, and with the help of the West, find a civilized and constructive approach involving compromise to deal with Russia related issues. This can be done by a new government, only. Current authorities are not able to do that not only because they lack capacity but because they blocked this way due to their own actions.'

Finally, the part of experts who evaluated the 2008 events as confrontation between Russia and the West, believes that despite the existence of common interests normalization of relations between Russia and Georgia depends on the development of relations between Russia and the West.

All the interviewed respondents hold the same point of view, which, actually, coincides with that of the interviewed experts. 'Security, economic and cultural issues seem to be of interest for both parties. Here we have two Orthodox countries and this should become a foundation for the normalization of relations. These nations need each other.' 'Personal relations are very important. In Georgia, traditionally, neighbors have always been the first ones to be approached for help.' Similar to experts, the majority of respondents does not believe in the possibility of normalization of relationships in the existing circumstances.

Thus, respondents believe that Russia and Georgia have common interests, which could serve as a basis for the beginning of dialogue and restoration of relationship. These are the issues of security in the region, joint fight against terrorism, economic, cultural and personal relations. However, most respondents are sure that given the current authorities, normalization of relations with Russia is almost impossible.

10. Similarities and differences between Russia and Georgia

All the experts agree that the main similarity between Russian and Georgian authorities is an identical domestic policy. 'Authorities in Georgia and Russia try to preserve the authoritarian regime in the so-called democratic setting. They both control business, the Media and judicial bodies. In this respect, Georgian leaders imitate Russian colleagues. 'There is autocratic rule in both countries and both went through the same experience – Putin subordinated business, the Media and the court; He dealt as harshly as he could with his opponents. Political prisoners appeared in the country. The same was done by Saakashvili. Both leaders tried to create mass youth organizations to reinforce their position; both run active propaganda to stir hatred, fear, mistrust and create enemy image.' The policy of present authorities is driven by personal interests, the motive of preserving power. 'Both sides need enemy image and they successfully use each other for this purpose.'

It has been also stated that even PR technologies used for the strengthening of power are the same.

Apart from this, Russia and Georgia 'are united by quite painful circumstances – they have to overcome the past, which is not so easy to do.' An important similarity is Orthodox faith. Another similarity is 'underdeveloped economies of both countries.'

According to one of the experts, another similar trait is irrationality. 'Both countries have common interests, but both act against their own interests. For example, both countries are interested in building democracy, good relationship with their neighbors, joint struggle for stability in the North Caucasus. Both are interested in getting closer to the West. EU and NATO membership is beneficial for both countries; thanks to this Russia would have a more stable and safe southern flank; for Georgia it would be a guarantor of state security, because Georgia needs to defend itself not only from Russia but also from other forces. Anyway, all that is so obvious that you cannot differently label the actions of these two parties. We could assume that it is 'blindness' caused by really huge ambitions of the elites on both sides.'

Respondents also expressed the opposite opinion. Many actions of Georgian authorities really look irrational. For example, despite the fact that a necessary condition for the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity is an active support from Russia, Georgian authorities encourage, in a planned way, antagonistic attitude towards Russia: the President of Georgia declares that war has not come to the end, that occupation is going on, but, at the same time, rules out the possibility of starting negotiations until the last invader leaves Georgia. However, as experts believes, such actions are not caused by irrationality, but by the personal interests of the political elite, by the need to preserve power.

‘Creation of a permanent external threat and marginalization of the political opposition looking for ‘Moscow’s hand’ as the source of its material support as well as any kind of mass protest, has become the main mechanism stabilizing domestic political situation. Total intrastate control requires the existence of a permanent, irrational and aggressive source of external threat, and Moscow wonderfully, even with seeming eagerness, fits into this role.’ According to the same expert, anyway, many things still look awkward and illogical. For example, ‘having announced Russia as threat number one, Georgian authorities transfer under the control of Russian monopolist companies a number of its strategically important energy and economic facilities, also after the war in August 2008. The Georgian government has introduced one-way visa regime with the republics and autonomies of the North Caucasus (or the territories bordering the country), with which, according to the declarations, war has not yet come to the end. At the same time it has introduced two-way visa regime with Iran, a big energy superpower causing serious problems to Georgia’s strategic partners (the US and EU), which look for separate energy transportation corridors in the region. Who would welcome this kind of decision in the US? What we see as a result is that Russia is able to pursue its long-term strategic interests in the Caucasus with the help of the policy of the current Georgian government, which it finds suitable enough. If we imagine, for a minute, that Tbilisi takes decisions favoring Moscow, many things that look strange or illogical immediately become rational and convincing. But even the most daring assumption cannot clarify all the questions or explain what actually involves emotions, ambitions, thinking style, etc.’ The expert believes that this is where lies the difference between the governments of the countries: Russia acts in line with its geostrategic interests, whereas Georgia – against its own interests.

It has to be emphasized that expert opinion has been shared by all the interviewed students. As already mentioned above, they think that ‘it mistakes have not been made by the Russian side, because whatever happened suited Russia.’ ‘Russia did what its country needed’, or it managed to accomplish its political and geostrategic objectives. NATO and EU membership issue has been solved in its favor (at least, in the short run). Russia managed to return and ‘legalize’ the military bases withdrawn from the territory of Georgia. A similar opinion was expressed by the new wave IDPs: ‘The difference is that the Russian government turned out to be more clever, because we lost in any respect.’

Experts noted another difference: Georgia strives to integrate into the EU, whereas Russia tries to restore the empire.

Finally, according to the experts, the largest segment of our public ‘is well aware of the essence of the problem and understands that there is no ethnic confrontation between Georgians and Russians. The sensible part of public in both countries understands that all that is about global political problem and

Georgia is only a part of this problem. All the above guarantees the following: In the presence of political will, it won't be difficult to restore relations.' In other words, the problem is the deficit of political will, rather than confrontation between the nations. 'This is a purely political conflict.' 'It will be much more difficult to establish relations between the Abkhaz and Georgians, than between Georgians and Russians, since there was some ethnic confrontation between Georgians and Abkhazians, which is not the case with Georgians and Russians. These are politicians of Georgia and Russia that confront each other.'

Most respondents, irrespective of their age, express the ideas that are, essentially, similar to expert opinion. Authorities in both countries 'pursue similar, antidemocratic, unfair domestic policy.' 'Similar reforms have been implemented in both countries, authorities treat their population in the same way and the leaders of both countries are characterized by manic striving for power.' 'There is dictatorship in both countries; both countries have become victims of the political elite's ambitions and people are not respected in either of them.' 'In both countries authorities control the Mass Media, the court and business.' Another similarity is that protectionism and nepotism is flourishing in both countries. Finally, part of respondents believes that the governments of both countries act against the interests of their own state.

All the respondents share the opinion that common religious faith is a very important factor. They also note that both countries have a common past: 'For a long time we lived in the same state; we both went through the World War II', 'we had a similar cultural space.'

As for the differences, part of respondents names the following main difference: 'one side is the aggressor, the other side - is its victim.' Russia and Georgia also have a different potential – size of territory, resources, etc.

As we know, the person's attitude to an individual or an object contains the layers she/he is not aware of. To reveal like unconscious characteristics they use standard projection methods. For this reason respondents were asked the following question: '**Which animal would you compare Georgia with?**' Their responses were interpreted using three characteristics included in C. Osgood's scale: **attractiveness** (associated with a pleasant animal), **power** (size, physical strength of the associated image) and **activity** (the animal's aggression). In all the age groups Russia was most frequently associated with the **bear** ('bear', 'brown bear', 'write bear'), because 'Russia is very strong', 'because it is a ruthless predator', 'if you do not touch the bear he is quiet and clever, but when he gets angry, he becomes aggressive'. In terms of frequency, this was followed by association with the fox: 'sly,' 'cunning and sly; she has deceived us'. Next came the association with the pig: 'voracious', 'never has a mercy on anyone; just wants to fill its stomach', 'insatiable.' Russia also evoked associations with the wolf, tiger, and the eagle. 'Russia is an eagle and Georgia is a little bird; as they say no matter how high the bird flies, anyway the eagle flies higher'.

Thus, in any case Russia is associated with a less attractive, strong and aggressive animal – predator.

As for Georgia, it was most frequently associated with the ostrich (‘escape from reality’) and the hare (sometimes with a leveret which emphasizes attractiveness); respondents often associated Georgia with a hind and a lamb (‘but a bit bold lamb’), that is with an attractive and beautiful, but weak, unaggressive and coward animal. There were also other responses, like ‘the tiger with the heart of the mouse’, ‘the turtle, because we develop at a turtle pace, but the shell does not protect us’. Several respondents compared Georgia with an eagle, but in this case an eagle (Georgia) was confronted with a dragon, a bear and a lion (Russia), that is a stronger and more aggressive animal.

Thus, there is no substantial difference between cognitive (rational) and unconscious (emotional) perception of Russia. Respondents perceive Russia as a strong, aggressive and less attractive state, which could any time threaten small, weak and unaggressive Georgia.

To sum up the above said, we could conclude the following:

- The majority of respondents, including experts, see significant similarities between Russia and Georgia. In both countries, the autocratic regime and the governments control business, the Mass Media and judicial bodies; they arrest disobedient people, restrict human rights, and political opponents are harshly dealt with; political prisoners have appeared in both countries. In this sense, Georgian leaders imitate Russian colleagues. Both leaders have tried to create mass youth organizations to reinforce their positions; they are involved in active propaganda to stir hatred, fear, and mistrust; create *enemy image*. In both countries policy is determined by the personal interests of the political elite – basically, by its desire to preserve power, which is done using similar PR technologies. Population’s opinion is neglected in both countries. According to some respondents, protectionism and nepotism are flourishing in the country. Another point of similarity is underdeveloped economy.
- All the respondents see the following significant similarities: common faith, common past, ‘similar cultural space.’
- Respondents see more similarities than differences. In addition to objective differences (size of territory, resources, potential) the main difference is that Russia is an aggressor and Georgia is its victim. There is also another difference: Georgia strives for integration, whereas Russia tries to rebuild the empire.
- According to one of the experts, interviewed students and a significant number of new wave IDPs, the main difference between the counties is that Russia acts in accordance with its geostrategic interests, whereas Georgians act against the interests of their own country.

11. Georgians and Russians: similarities and differences

When describing Russians, respondents speak about underdeveloped rationality. 'Unfortunately, with Russians who are kind by nature, you can observe the deficit of the rational component. This is a big problem, both for them and their neighbors.' 'It is difficult to say something about the character of this kind of irrationality. Is it Asian or cosmic? What is clear is that the country, with a strong European element in the ruling elite (e.g. in the 19th century) almost eradicated this element from itself, by establishing something very *Asian* like the Soviet regime.'

Part of the experts stated that it is difficult to better describe Russians than Dostoevsky did. This is a nation who can be a fantastic creator, possess fantastic creativity, and, at the same time be fantastically immoral, fantastically aggressive, etc. 'Russians are internally inconsistent in many respects. It is difficult to describe them in a consistent way. You see something in one point, and radically different - in another. As Radishev said, you can't understand Russia with your mind.'

'It is not easy to describe Russians, because, differently from Georgia, in Russia, difference between a cultured and an uneducated person is very big. In Georgia, you can meet a peasant with manners and behavior typical of an educated person. In Russia, difference between an educated and an uneducated person is more striking than in Georgia. May be, the reason is the crisis in the Georgian higher education system observed in the recent years, due to which the difference between educated and uneducated person has diminished.'

Experts believe that there are many similarities between Russians and Georgians. 'Because of the Orthodox faith, both nations are tolerant. We have the same cultural space because we lived together for almost two centuries.' 'Both are collectivist nations and both are characterized by irrationalism. It is typical of both nations to do totally crazy things.' 'They often tell us that there are two Russia, not one. But like Georgia, there is one Russia too. There are just different people, like in any country.' 'Unfortunately, today's Russia has not developed as a state attractive for other countries. It was different in XIX century, when Russia was represented by a much more attractive state model. For Georgia of that period Russia was both NATO and the EU. This was the way to Europe. Russia was a part of Europe.' 'During two centuries the two nations found a common language and got adjusted to each other. It is not about identity, of course, but compared to other people, Russians and Georgians better understand each other. It is very important, because this facilitates communication.'

According to one of the experts, the existing confrontation - a normal human relationship between Georgians and Russians, on the one hand, and political

antagonism, on the other hand can be explained by ‘a civilized choice made by Georgians.’ We want to become a part of another civilization, not of the one that is called Russia. This is probably the main problem. However, we have many common features in our character and irrationality in the first place.’

As for the assessments made by other respondents, the student’s group has stated that ‘Russians are suppressors by nature.’ However, this was immediately followed by the comment ‘that a person’s individuality is not determined by his/her nationality. Suppressors are representatives of the government, but not people.’

It has to be mentioned that the latter opinion is shared by the majority of students. Respondents are much stricter when evaluating Georgians. ‘I. Chavchavadze wrote *A happy nation* one hundred years ago, but instead of developing and changing for the best, we even became worse. We are ready to deny our national values; we have become lazier.’ ‘It is characteristic of today’s Georgians to live at the expense of others.’ ‘Georgians have lost their uniqueness, started to imitate others.’ ‘We can do anything not to be blamed for a lack of liberalism.’

According to the judgments made by the next age group, ‘Russians, are colder and less emotional by nature than Georgians.’ ‘Differently from us, Russians are more law abiding and diligent.’ ‘Georgians are more talented, but lack inner discipline.’ ‘Russians are self-oriented, whereas Georgians are hesitant.’; ‘Russians are law abiding and patient, but they are ungrateful and envious.’ ‘Georgians are ambitious, and hot’; ‘Georgians are explosive, proud, ambitious, hospitable, ingenious, trustful, envious, irresponsible, patient, always want to get maximal results.’ ‘Georgians are romantic, cannot assess one’s own abilities, always aspire for more than are able to achieve’; ‘Georgians are kind and explosive.’

It should be mentioned that emotional and moral characteristics prevail in the ‘portrait’ of Georgians.

Similar to experts, many respondents think that Georgians have more things in common with Russians than with other nations. The tolerance of Russians and Georgians has been also emphasized. It is interesting to note that this opinion is shared by a large majority of new wave IDPs. They say that during the August war, the population was often helped by Russian soldiers. ‘We were ordered to liquidate you; so, run away.’ ‘We had a person in the village who was chained to bed, so it was impossible to evacuate him. Russians would bring him food and medicine.’ ‘Soldiers gave cigarettes to the people who stayed at home; they asked for alcohol but not for free and exchanged it for food products.’ All the members in this group stated the following: ‘There is no confrontation between the nations. These are the governments of both countries that are guilty for what has happened.’

12. Foreign languages

In response to the question regarding the language mastered by the respondent, all the experts named 'Russian and English' (some also named Georgian and French). Similar answers were received in response to the question regarding the language they teach (would teach) their children.

Most respondents in the students' group know English, some – Russian and German. They intend to teach their children also 'Russian and English languages'. In the upper age groups almost all the respondents know Russian; part of respondents knows English, German and French. But they also teach (would teach) their children the Russian and English languages.

13. Results of the content analysis of information television programs

As mentioned above, along with the main research we conducted content analysis of information programs of three TV channels with national coverage. These were Public TV, "Rustavi 2" and "Imedi". The programs on Russia and attitude to Russia broadcast by these channels were subjected to a two-week analysis. The results show that in all these information programs Russia was mentioned at least **three times**. The most important thing is that in every instance negative attitude to Russia was demonstrated (in direct or indirect form). Also, direct statements were encountered more often compared to indirect cases. The latter were observed only in those instances where news covered domestic events in Russia that were unrelated to Georgia.

During the two weeks, there was no instance of mentioning Russia in a neutral or positive context. These three channels are no different in this respect. The only thing we can say is that the tone of information programs on public TV was milder and less aggressive compared to "Rustavi 2" and "Imedi".

The obtained **results confirm the opinion of interviewed experts**, who state that enemy image is being actively created. The programs on the mentioned channels seem to serve this purpose.

Instead of conclusion

According to the hypothesis of the present survey, experience of living in the former Soviet Union has an effect on the perception of Russia. However, as shown by the conducted research, this assumption has been only partially confirmed. In particular, it has pointed to the only difference between the students and the other age groups: Students do not think that it is advisable to establish deep, friendly relations between Georgia and Russia. They only find unacceptable hostility with a neighboring country and being in the state of 'cold

war.’ They believe that the policy of Georgian authorities should be directed at the establishment of good neighbor relationship, constructive relations with Russia, ‘since you can do nothing about the geographical factor’. Differently from students, respondents in upper age groups speak with regret about the deep friendly relations and believe that they should be restored.

It seems that the opinion about the existence of ‘two Russias’ that used to be quite common in Georgian society, has undergone a certain transformation: “Russian authorities’ have been differentiated from ‘Russian people’.

Therefore, survey results clearly confirm that Georgian-Russian confrontation is perceived as a pure political conflict: all the respondents believe that confrontation is between the government elites rather than people. What we observe on both sides is the deficit of political will rather than confrontation between the two peoples. All this shows that it will not be difficult to normalize relations between the two countries, in case political will is demonstrated by both parties.

The experts and most respondents think that another problem is competitive, asymmetric relations between the parties that benefit Russia and, also, the tendency to solve problems by force, which prevents from searching for constructive ways of conflict resolution that need to be based on parity principles.

Finally, research results lead to the following conclusion: The population of our country has developed **certain immunity** against official propaganda and the official sources of mass information (there is no doubt that the three channels with the information programs subjected to a two-week analysis belong to this category) are not the **main** and, what is most important, **reliable source** of information. This assumption is based on the observation that our respondents’ opinions about a number of Russia related issues sharply differ from the official point of view.

ATTACHMENT

The Questionnaire

1. Which language do you speak?
2. Which language do you teach (have you taught) your children?
3. How would you describe the Russian government's policy toward Georgia?
4. How would you describe the Georgian government's policy toward Russia?
5. What mistakes were made by Georgian and Russian authorities in relation to Russia and Georgia?
6. What factors impede the normalization of Georgia-Russia relations?
7. Does confrontation between Georgia and Russia affect Georgian economy?
8. Do personal interests of the political elites affect political and economic relations between Russia and Georgia?
9. What is your evaluation of the August 2008 events? What happened? Was it possible to prevent the war?
10. Is there any threat from Russia? If yes, what kind of threat is it and on which occasions should it be expected?
11. What are the common interests for Russia and Georgia that could serve as a basis for the commencement of dialogue and rebuilding relations?
12. In what way are Russia and Georgia similar/different?
13. How would you describe Georgians and Russians?
14. Which animal would you compare Russia/Georgia with?

PERCEPTION OF GEORGIA AND GEORGIANS IN THE RUSSIAN SOCIETY	5
I. THE PROGRAM OF EMPIRICAL STUDY	5
II. RESULTS.	6
1. ATTITUDE TOWARD GEORGIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CIS COUNTRIES.	6
2. THE IMAGE OF GEORGIA IN THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN MEDIA.....	8
3. GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD GEORGIA AS A COUNTRY	9
3.1. Relations between Russia and Georgia.....	11
3.2. Perceptions of Mikheil Saakashvili among the Russian Public	12
3.3. Attitude toward the August 2008 conflict.....	13
4. THE PROSPECTS OF RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SOCIETIES AND CULTURES	16
5. GEORGIA AS SEEN ON THE RUSSIAN INTERNET FORUM	18
6. THE MOVIE LOVE WITH AN ACCENT AS AN ATTEMPT TO RESTART THE CULTURAL DIALOGUE (BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF REVIEWS ON WWW.AFISHA.RU)	24
7. GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIAN BLOGOSPHERE	25
8. CONCLUSION	26
III. APPENDICES.....	27
 PERCEPTION OF RUSSIA AND RUSSIANS IN GEORGIAN SOCIETY	 35
DESCRIPTION OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	35
THE MAIN FINDINGS.....	36
1. PERCEPTION OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT’S POLICY TOWARDS GEORGIA	36
2. PERCEPTION OF THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT’S POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA	40
3. MISTAKES MADE BY THE CONFRONTING PARTIES	43
4. REASONS IMPEDING NORMALIZATION OF GEORGIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS	48
5. INFLUENCE OF GEORGIA-RUSSIA CONFRONTATION ON GEORGIAN ECONOMY	49
6. IMPACT OF THE PERSONAL INTERESTS OF THE POLITICAL ELITES ON GEORGIA-RUSSIA POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS	51
7. EVALUATION OF THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR IN AUGUST 2008: WHAT HAPPENED AND IF IT WAS POSSIBLE TO AVOID THE WAR	53
8. EVALUATION OF POSSIBLE THREATS COMING FROM RUSSIA	58
9. POTENTIALLY COMMON INTERESTS FOR RUSSIA AND GEORGIA	61
10. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RUSSIA AND GEORGIA	63
11. GEORGIANS AND RUSSIANS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES	67
12. FOREIGN LANGUAGES	69
13. RESULTS OF THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION TELEVISION PROGRAMS... INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION	69
 ATTACHMENT	 71